EARLY CHRISTIAN RITUAL LIFE

Edited by Richard E. DeMaris,
Jason T. Lamoreaux and Steven C. Muir

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Scholars across many fields have come to realize that ritual is an integral element of human life and a vital aspect of all human societies. Yet, this realization has been slow to develop among scholars of early Christianity. *Early Christian Ritual Life* attempts to counteract the undervaluing of ritual by placing it at the forefront of early Christian life. Rather than treating ritual in isolation or in a fragmentary way, this book examines early Christian ritual life as a whole. The authors explore an array of Christian ritual activity, employing ritual theory critically and explicitly to make sense of various ritual behaviors and their interconnections. Written by leading experts in their fields, this collection is divided into three parts:

- Interacting with the divine
- Group interactions
- Contesting and creating ritual protocols

This book is ideal for religious studies students seeking an introduction to the dynamic research areas of ritual studies and early Christian practice.

Richard E. DeMaris is a Senior Research Professor at Valparaiso University, USA, and a specialist in New Testament studies.

Jason T. Lamoreaux is an Adjunct Professor at Texas Christian University, USA. His research focuses on the social contexts of early Christianity.

Steven C. Muir is a Professor at Concordia University of Edmonton, Canada, and a specialist in early Christianity in the Greco–Roman world.

"Framed by a clear discussion of theories and definitions of ritual, *Early Christian Ritual Life* is a set of essays probing the rituals of early Christianity. The questions pursued by the editors and authors are valuable for advancing critical reflections on ritual."

Ronald L. Grimes, *Emeritus Professor of Religion and Culture, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada.*

"This book consists of a rich collection of essays, each of which combines theoretical discussion with careful analysis of textual and/or material evidence. The contributions illustrate how members of Christ groups copied, adapted, transformed, or in some cases transgressed aspects of ritual life present in their respective environments. Together the essays underscore how important ritual practices, in all of their diversity, were for the formation and maintenance of ancient Christ groups."

Alicia J. Batten, *Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, Canada.*

"A truly major contribution to the study of early Christian ritual in the context of Mediterranean religion, society, and culture during the first three centuries CE. It contains substantive guidance toward major theories about ritual in personal lives, social groups, and small and large institutions, along with very helpful applications of selected theories to particular issues and texts. A major strength is its significant coverage of issues beyond the New Testament into the second and third centuries CE."

Vernon K. Robbins, *Emory University, USA.*

"This volume is deeply infused with ritual theory and understanding of the quest for divine knowledge in the ancient world. The study of ritual in Early Christianity is a crucial area of scholarship which has not received the attention it deserves. This valuable collection of essays makes an important contribution in addressing the gap. *Early Christian Ritual Life* is sure to stimulate many new conversations and investigations."

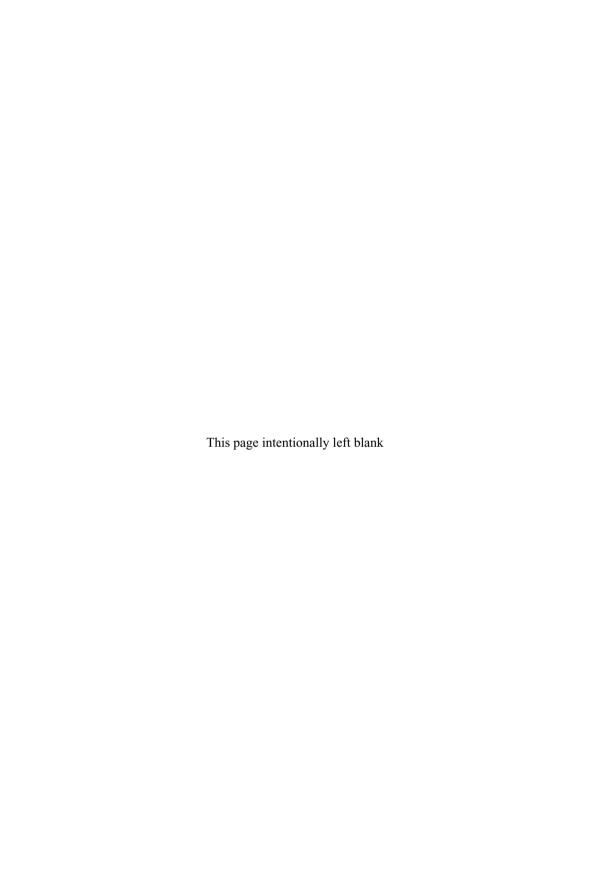**Margaret Y. MacDonald**, *Dean of Arts, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Canada.*

"This new collection of studies introduces wonderful insights into a fundamental element of human society, tracing it from home to temple, from dealing with divinity to negotiating community, and situating early Christians firmly within their social world. It challenges many traditional assumptions of older scholarship and paves the way for new understandings of thinking so different from ours, and yet so much the same."

Carolyn Osiek, *Charles Fischer Professor of New Testament Emerita, Brite Divinity School, USA.*

"The study of Christian origins has tended to center on ideology and rhetoric while sidelining more enactive features of religious movements. This volume helpfully shifts the center of gravity to ritual action by exploring how concrete behaviors help to instantiate such abstract concepts as honor, personal transformation, power, marking and maintaining social boundaries, and managing death; as well as practical matters of how rituals are generated, revised, and rejected. A valuable reconsideration of the field."

Colleen Shantz, *St. Michael's College,*
University of Toronto, Canada.

"The contributions to this volume merge social-scientific and ritual studies in a novel attempt to illuminate how groups and group boundaries were defined, maintained and protected in early Christianity. Issues that vary from baptism and funerary rituals to dietary and dining practices are analysed in a creative and innovative merging of insights."

Pieter F. Craffert, *University of South Africa.*

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In memory of our beloved colleague Dietmar ("Diet") Neufeld (1949–2015), friend, scholarly brother, and raconteur *par excellence*

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Ritva H. Williams is an independent scholar and Pastor of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, USA. She is the author of *Stewards, Prophets, Keepers of the Word: Leadership in the Early Church* (2006), *The Bible's Importance for the Church Today* (2009), and numerous articles and essays.

PREFACE

"We should do a book about ritual together." That is what Jason Lamoreaux concluded as the 2014 spring meeting of the Context Group wound down, and attendees thought about how to preserve and channel the energy generated at the meeting. Richard DeMaris had been in conversation for years with a colleague at this school, Valparaiso University, about ritual in the Bible. Since that colleague, Caroline Leeb, was a Hebrew Bible scholar and he a New Testament scholar, it made sense to treat the whole Bible. We would foreground rituals reflected in those texts and write a book together titled *Re-Riting the Bible*. Yet, the conversation never developed into a research and writing program, so the idea went dormant.

Jason also wanted to add Steven Muir as a third editor since he had worked on ritual. And so it was that the three of us revived the idea for a book on ritual in the Bible and narrowed the focus to the New Testament. *Re-Riting the New Testament* was our working title for several months.

We circulated a book outline over the summer and early fall, adding comment upon comment. The annotated outline was becoming a mess of colored comment boxes, but an organizing structure for the book was beginning to emerge. Together we also hammered out a book précis under the title *Early Christianity from a Ritual Viewpoint*, to distribute to potential publishers. The November meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) was approaching, and we wanted to pitch the book to a short list of publishers we regarded as ideal.

All six publisher representatives we talked with welcomed seeing a full proposal. Some offered advice. We credit David Clines at Sheffield Phoenix Press with prompting us to come up with a livelier title. "How about *Early Christian Ritual Life*?" Brilliant, we thought.

We also took advantage of the meeting to recruit our contributors. The emerging field of Ritual Studies embraces many disciplines, especially the social sciences, so we were looking for scholars, junior and senior, male and female, who prized interdisciplinary work. We found them among the members of the Context Group

and the leaders of SBL's program section called Ritual in the Biblical World. Several contributors to this book have a stake in both groups.

As we composed a full proposal, we began talking about audience and aim for the book. We wanted to avoid something technical; we had a broader audience in mind. If we were going to make a case for the importance of early Christian ritual life, it needed to be made to the broadest audience possible, not specialists alone. So we thought in terms of a book for the classroom, one that could be paired with a conventional introduction to the New Testament. Such texts typically take a literary or historical approach, neglecting ritual altogether. Our book would offer a different viewpoint and do things a little differently. Some essays model the use of a ritual studies approach in a detailed case study of a text or site; others survey a variety of data.

The editors at Routledge have supported this project and its aim from our very first meeting with them. The encouragement and cooperation of Eve Mayer and Laura Briskman in the New York office and, more recently, Rebecca Shillabeer and Sarah Gore in the Milton Park office in Oxford have been exceptional.

Also exceptional has been the support of our wives, Sarah Glenn DeMaris, Tamra Lamoreaux, and Susan Crawford, who in ways great and small have made this collaborative enterprise possible.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANF	*Anti-Nicene Fathers*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
IG II²	Kirchner, J., ed. *Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno anteriores.* 4 vols. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1913–1940
JRitSt	*Journal of Ritual Studies*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSCGSup	Sokolowski, F. *Lois sacrées des cités grecques: supplément. École française d'Athènes.* Travaux et memories, fasc. 11. Paris: E. de Boccard, 1962
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. Stuart Jones. *A Greek–English Lexicon.* 9th ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OGIS	*Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae.* Edited by W. Dittenberger. 2 vols. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903–1905
PGM	*Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri.* Edited by K. Preisendanz. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973–1974
P.Oxy.	Oxyrynchus Papyri
SEG	*Supplementum epigraphicum graecum.* Leiden: Brill, 1923–
*Syll*³	Dittenberger, W. *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd ed., 1915–1924
TAM	Kalinka, E., et al. *Tituli Asiae Minoris.* Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1901–

INTRODUCTION

With respect to ritual

Richard E. DeMaris

"Ritual, like language, tool use, symbolism, and music, is one of the constituent elements in the mix of what it means to be human" (Stephenson 2015, 1). So begins Barry Stephenson's recent introductory book on ritual. As commonplace and essential as ritual is, however, characterizing it is surprisingly difficult, as is grasping its importance to all human societies, including early Christian groups. There is very limited consensus about how to define it. Likewise, people under-estimate the vital role it plays in human life. This has been especially true among scholars of early Christianity, at least until very recently. This book represents an attempt to counteract the undervaluing of ritual by placing it front and center as it considers early Christian life. More than that, it seeks to situate early Christian ritual in the rich ritual fabric of the larger Greco–Roman world and to do so by using ritual theory selectively, critically, and explicitly.

Endeavoring to define ritual

A selection of recent *New York Times* headlines:

- When a Precision Airport Security Ritual Works Too Well
- New York Today: Tax Day Ritual Recedes
- Ritual of Ever-Present Coverage May Not Pass Muster with Trump
- Losing a Comforting Ritual: Treatment
- A Ghastly Ritual Repeats Itself
- Political Rituals After Mass Shootings
- The Embarrassing Debt Ceiling Ritual
- Another Mass Grave Dug by ISIS in Iraq, and a Ghastly Ritual Renewed

To get at early Christian ritual and its significance, it might be best to begin with how ritual is understood nowadays. Starting there is especially important because

contemporary usage of the term ritual is strikingly inconsistent, and the way it is commonly used differs decidedly from more considered, scholarly notions of ritual—certainly different from how contributors to this book understand it. The first four headlines above and the stories they introduce understand ritual as repetitive behavior or routine that has an immediate and obvious goal in view. In the story under the first headline, Laura Masse (as told to Joan Raymond) describes a set of actions she considers her airport security ritual. When she passes through security, she always sets her belongings on the conveyor belt in a set order: shoes, belt, carry-on, purse. "Keeping things in this order," she says, "has become a ritual" (Raymond 2008). By that Masse evidently means a routine, and she admits that some would simply call it obsessive-compulsive behavior. Whether she is obsessive or not, Masse's goal is explicit: to speed her way through security and not leave anything behind.

An explicit goal also lies behind what the second headline labels tax day ritual. Journalist Andy Newman looks back to a time before widespread electronic filing, when last-minute filers would swamp major urban post offices every year at closing time on or near April 15th. Their aim was clear: to meet the mailing deadline and thus avoid the late filing penalty. To Newman, this was ritual because it was predictable and recurrent human behavior. It was also intensely communal: Newman notes what he called the "frenzy," "circus," and "mad scene" that typified the sizable gatherings at post office doors (Newman 2014). This collective aspect makes Newman's sense of ritual quite different from Masse's, which is personal, though both agree about it being purposeful.

While the goal is less exact and the behavior less defined, the third headline points to a protocol or custom that has been in place for decades: a designated group of journalists, a so-called press pool, sticks close to the president of the United States at all times. The pool can contact the president at a moment's notice and can convey information about the interaction to the media immediately. The aim is to keep the press and public informed, however that is understood, especially if an emergency or the unexpected occurs. Journalist Michael Grynbaum calls this the ritual of ever-present coverage, and notes that President Trump is less ready than presidents of the last few decades to tolerate this practice (Grynbaum 2016).

The fourth headline places medical treatment in the category of ritual. By treatment, journalist Dana Jennings refers to therapy for prostate cancer generally and the thirty-three sessions of radiation he underwent specifically. Yet in this case the immediate and obvious goal of such therapy, the elimination of cancer cells, is not the primary focus. Nor does Jennings concentrate on the tightly scripted and repetitive actions of the medical technicians in administering the radiation therapy. Rather, Jennings offers a personal take on the proceedings, finding in these protocols something that structured his day-to-day life and provided interaction with others. They also defined him as a patient and thus gave him a clear status, which he found reassuring. When his treatment ends, Jennings feels at a loss (Jennings 2009).

The last four headlines and the stories that follow, while they also understand ritual as repetitive behavior or a routine, find that the purported goal of such action,

if there even is one, is never met. In contrast to the first four examples, ritual here seems to be a pattern of behavior that is invariably fruitless or pointless. The fifth headline refers to a mass shooting that prompted visceral reaction from the public but ultimately led to no legislative action to curb such shootings. The article quotes President Obama:

> I do get concerned that this becomes a ritual that we go through every three, four months, where we have these horrific mass shootings, and yet, we're not willing to take some basic actions that we know could make a difference.
> *(Blow 2013)*

A headline from two years later, the sixth one, deals with the same issue, specifies the nature of the ritual, and agrees about its futility. Mass shootings prompt reaction from public figures and a predictable discussion of such tragedies, but the public expressions of heartache produce no results, which the editorial calls "lame public rituals in which politicians express grief and then retreat quickly into denial about this scourge" (Editors of the *New York Times* 2015).

Also addressing a political issue, the seventh headline refers to the periodic raising of the U.S. government's debt ceiling so that the government can borrow money and meet its obligations. This does not happen automatically. Congress must authorize such action, but in recent years has dragged its feet in doing so. It is this standoff between legislators and administration, with its predictable threats and posturing, that the article decries as the debt ceiling ritual. Journalist David Firestone equates ritual with the unnecessary and senseless, for the recurring stalemate over raising the borrowing limit seems not to have any point. Rather, it is an embarrassing activity, producing only uncertainty in the economy and confirming that dysfunction is rife in Washington, D.C. (Firestone 2014).

Predictable futility seems synonymous with ritual in the story introduced by the eighth and last headline as well. The article reports that as Iraqi security forces reclaim ISIS-held territory they regularly encounter mass graves, a mark of ISIS's reign of terror. Iraqis with missing family members—there are many—visit these graves, hoping to determine the whereabouts of their loved ones. As a soldier in the Iraqi army says, "So I came here. … I don't know his [my brother's] destiny, his fate. At the very least I need to find his body. … So we can have a funeral" (Arango 2016). But such recurring visits, journalist Tim Arango notes, are fruitless. They are a painful ritual that resolves nothing.

Considered together, what do these popular uses of the term ritual say about it? On the one hand, all eight articles agree that it is a set of actions or scripted activity that occurs repeatedly, either regularly or on specific occasions. On the other hand, they reach opposing positions regarding the point of such activity. Four journalists think the purpose of ritual action is obvious and clear, but the other four find ritual distinguished by its futility or pointlessness. Which is it?

Neither, according to many ritual theorists and social scientists. While they agree that ritual activity is scripted and repetitive, what it does is neither obvious

nor pointless. They try to distinguish routine activity whose purpose is clear from ritual activity, in which "the relationship between the means and the end is not 'intrinsic,' i.e., is either irrational or non-rationale" (Goody 1961, 159). Or, as Victor Turner puts it, ritual is "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine " (Turner 1967, 19). Edmund Leach offers examples: ritual denotes a

> predictable action or series of actions that cannot be justified by a "rational" means-to-ends type of explanation. In this sense the English custom of shaking hands is a ritual, but the act of planting potatoes with a view to a harvest is not.
> *(Leach 1968, 13.521–22)*

If ritual is neither regimented instrumental activity like assembling an automobile nor pointless activity, how can one best characterize what it does? Instructive are the public activities that have occurred at the sites of terrorist incidents in the last few years, such as Boylston Street, site of the Boston marathon bombing, the Bataclan concert hall in Paris, the Maelbeek metro station in Brussels, and Manchester Arena–Victoria Station. Initially these sites draw individuals who mourn the loss of a loved one by placing flowers, lighting a candle, or saying a prayer at makeshift memorials. Soon thereafter, and later at the anniversaries of these events, hundreds or thousands assemble in a more organized fashion to observe a minute's silence, conduct vigils, sing, march, release balloons or doves, dedicate commemorative plaques or sculptures, and so forth. In short, an elaborate ritual develops at these sites. Those attending and participating in the ritual are mourning the dead and honoring the victims of terrorism, but the ritual—the peaceful assembly open to all—also gives bodily expression to the public ethic of the modern, western world: respect for others, tolerance, unity, and peace in response to the violence, division, and hatred thought to be embodied in the terrorist acts. Days after the terrorist attack of 7 April 2017 in central Stockholm, Sweden's prime minister put the matter this way in a ceremony honoring the dead: "Our unity will always be stronger than the forces that seek to tear us apart. … Our way of life will never be suppressed. Our democracy will triumph over fundamentalism" (Anderson 2017).

Analyzing such commemorations, theorists would say that rituals have a referential aspect in that they reflect and express the social values and arrangements and the realities, both experienced and ideal, that participants in the ritual regard as fundamental. Evan Zuesse claims that rituals engage the "paradigmatic forms and relationships of reality" (Zuesse 2005, 7834). Monica Wilson says they reveal a group's "values at their deepest level" (Wilson 1954, 240). Other theorists claim that rituals also generate these values and structures and shape these realities in their performance rather than only reflecting them. Catherine Bell finds in ritual the ability to "reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world" (Bell 1992, 81). So, more than simply mirroring this order, "ritual practices are themselves the very production and negotiation of power relations" (Bell 1992, 196). (Ritva Williams explores this aspect of ritual more fully in Chapter 3.)

If Bell is right, how does ritual do this? As ritual theorists have noted, the connection between means and ends—ritual activity and its outcome—is subtle, not explicit. Bell observes that "the indexical features of ritual … present and validate the social hierarchy *indirectly* depicted by them" (Bell 1992, 42; italics added). She asserts that ritual is distinguished by a misrecognition of what it is in fact doing—that ritual participants do not fully realize the social order and reality that ritual creates. Dining with others, for instance, is much more than nourishing oneself and satisfying one's hunger. The very action distinguishes those at table from those that are not, thereby making a social distinction and fostering relationships among those at table. One's position at table, even in informal settings, is seldom accidental. Rather, it reflects and enacts the relationship among the diners, as do the other features of the meal: what is served; the quality and quantity of the food and drink; in what sequence diners are served; if diners serve themselves, who goes first, second, etc. At every step, an order or ranking is set up and on display around the dinner table, whether diners fully realize it or not (Douglas 1972, 61–70).

It is likely the physical character of ritual that accounts for how it negotiates power relations indirectly and subtly—bodily rather than mentally, subconsciously rather than consciously. As the dinner party example shows, relations are established bodily: the way people conduct themselves in relation to others during ritual activity betokens their social relationship (Bourdieu 1990, 71–72). Theorists are keen, therefore, to stress this aspect of ritual and would agree with Evan Zuesse when he says, "Ritual centers on the body, and to understand ritual one shall have to take the body seriously" (Zuesse 2005, 7834). This key feature of ritual prompts Jason Lamoreaux to highlight the "somatic medium" or "concrete somatic action" of eating—tasting, chewing, swallowing, and so forth—when he investigates the ritual negotiations reflected in 1 Corinthians 8–10 (Chapter 7). Likewise, Erin Vearncombe's exploration of manners—what she calls training of the body—and dress in Chapter 5 takes this aspect of ritual as a point of departure. In the course of her chapter she also offers a careful examination of how instrumental rituals are in shaping human disposition.

Complicating the determination of what ritual does is the inherently situational nature of rituals, which Bell also stresses (Bell 1992, 81). The social context in which a ritual takes place controls to a great extent its effects, as rituals do not have fixed outcomes. More precisely put, there is a feedback loop between ritual and its social frame or environment, and it is the interaction between the two that determines ritual's significance (Handelman 2004). Bell devotes a whole section of a second book, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, to the issue of ritual context. Part III of the book, titled "Context: The Fabric of Ritual Life," begins,

> A ritual is never alone. It is usually one ceremony among many in the larger ritual life of a person or community, one gesture among a multitude of gestures both sacred and profane, one embodiment among others of traditions of behavior down from one generation to another.
>
> *(Bell 1997, 171)*

Or, as Stanley Tambiah observes, "festivals, cosmic rituals, and rites of passage, however prescribed they may be, are always linked to status claims and interests of the participants, and therefore always open to contextual meanings" (Tambiah 1985, 125). Virtually all ritual theorists would agree that social context—where a ritual takes place, when it takes place, who participates in it, and so forth—is crucial for gauging a ritual's significance.

A definition meant to capture the referential, relational, physical, and situational character of ritual is this:

> Ritual is socially scripted and authorized verbal and nonverbal expression and bodily movement that situates individuals and groups in socially defining relationships and statuses and that enables them to address changing circumstances (often crises) by achieving group consensus, by confirming or altering social arrangements, and by engaging transpersonal values and ultimate realities. Because it is crucial to the social structuring of reality, it is always relational, situational, strategic, and identity-giving.[1]

The provisional nature of this and every other definition of ritual cannot be emphasized too much. (Nicola Hayward's useful review of definitions in Chapter 6 reflects the difficulty of defining ritual.) Edmund Leach concluded an encyclopedia article on ritual in this way:

> Finally, it has to be stressed that even among those who have specialized in this field there is the widest possible disagreement as to how the word ritual should be used and how the performance of ritual should be understood.
>
> *(Leach 1968, 13.526)*

No consensus has emerged in the fifty years since Leach wrote.[2] As important as it is, ritual is a highly contested concept, like art or religion. It defies easy definition.

Even if the definition given above fails to be entirely satisfactory, it is more accurate than popular understandings of ritual (and makes an important corrective of them), and it offers a sense of how ritual is understood and approached in the chapters that follow. Readers will notice that all the chapters pay close attention to the social setting of the ritual or rituals under discussion. Moreover, the relational or interactive character of ritual determined the orientation of this book and is the basis of its threefold structure: Part I: Interacting with the divine; Part II: Group interactions; Part III: Contesting and creating ritual protocols. The third part focuses on Christ followers' interactions with the rituals of the Mediterranean world as they developed new rituals.

Classifying rituals

Short of defining ritual, which some theorists avoid altogether, an alternative way of characterizing ritual is to assemble activities most would consider ritual and

organize them. This could be called the family resemblance or polythetic approach and acknowledges that there is no single trait or set of traits that every ritual possesses. Encyclopedic treatments of ritual collect a wide range of rituals, and group like or related rituals under discrete categories. The *Encyclopedia of Religious Rites, Rituals, and Festivals*, for instance, has 129 entries, and its groupings of ritual run from Academic Rituals and Agricultural Rituals to Satanic Rituals and Scatological Rituals (Salamone 2004, ix–x). More analytical and systematic is Ronald Grimes' taxonomy of eighteen ritual types, which he has refined over the course of thirty years: (1) rites of passage; (2) seasonal rites; (3) status conferring rites; (4) status maintenance rites; (5) status reversal rites; (6) celebration rites; (7) rites of mobility; (8) purification rites; (9) rites of exchange; (10) sacrificial rites; (11) agonistic rites (contests); (12) consecration rites; (13) ceremony; (14) commemoration; (15) mystical rites (inducing altered states of consciousness); (16) magical rites (healing, exorcism); (17) ritual drama; and (18) "new" rites (Grimes 2014, appendix 3; see also Grimes 1985, 68–116). These classifications, because they are relatively comprehensive, vividly demonstrate the vast range of ritual. On the other hand, the categories are so diverse that determining the commonality among them is difficult.

On the opposite end of the classification spectrum are schema that opt for bare-bones simplicity. Victor Turner once distinguished rites that mark transition or change in social status from those that maintain or confirm it, labeling the former ritual and the latter ceremony (Turner 1967, 95). While most ritual theorists would nowadays regard all such rites as ritual, the notion that rites either transform a ritual participant's social status, like rites of passage, or confirm it, like a commemoration of some sort, is a useful binary for sorting out what rituals do.

Slightly more elaborate is Lauri Honko's threefold division: (1) rites of passage; (2) calendrical rites; and (3) crisis rites (Honko 1979, 372–80; cf. Turner 1969, 168–69). Rites of passage focus on individuals and mark their movement from one status in life to another, such as a wedding to signal transition from single to married status. Calendrical rites are more communal and mark changes of season and events in the social and economic calendar. Rites of passage and calendrical rites are cyclical in that they mark the stages of life or the stages of the year. Noncyclical are crisis rites, which occur occasionally and unexpectedly. Here Honko has in mind ritual responses to catastrophes like fires, droughts, and epidemics. A variation on this tripartite scheme is that of Jens Schjødt, who finds that all rituals involve some kind of passage, rendering the rites of passage category superfluous. He opts for initiation rituals (in place of rites of passage), calendrical rituals, and crisis rituals. Whereas calendrical rituals maintain the status quo, crisis rituals bring groups or the individual from a negative to a neutral or normal state, while initiation takes the individual to a higher state or status (Schjødt 1986).

Situated between the Grimes and the Honko–Schjødt taxonomies are Catherine Bell's six categories or genres of ritual (1997, 93–137):

1. *Rites of passage* include rites of birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. They may include rites of initiation.

2. *Calendrical rites* mark seasonal changes, observe events in the social year, or commemorate important historical or mythical events.
3. *Rites of exchange and communion* include offerings to a deity, sacrifices, prayer, incantation, divination, consultation of oracles, and fertility rites and are undertaken in expectation of receiving something in return, such as fertility, long life, health, safe passage, or some more abstract benefit. These rites operate on a continuum between quid pro quo exchanges for defined benefits and nearly disinterested communion with, and devotion to, the divine.
4. *Rites of affliction* aim to mitigate the influence of negative forces or conditions such as demonic spirits, sins, and impurity. They include rituals of healing, exorcism, and purification, along with preparation for encounters with the divine (including entry into an alternate state of consciousness).
5. *Feasting, fasting, and festivals* express commitment and adherence to the defining values of a group, community, society, or culture. They include lamentations, processions, games and contests, pilgrimages, and carnivals and rituals of reversal.
6. *Political rites* are ceremonial practices that construct, display, and promote the power of political institutions (such as king, state, the village elders) or the political interests of distinct constituencies and subgroups.

The value of this and other classifications lies in their providing what Ritva Williams (Chapter 3) calls a model or "a cognitive map for observing, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing and analyzing ancient ritual practices." Bell admits that there is overlap among the categories and that they are not exhaustive. Moreover, some rituals could be assigned to more than one category. Nevertheless, several scholars have fruitfully deployed Bell's classification to examine the rites they find described in biblical literature, be it the Old Testament Apocrypha (Davila 2009), the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Davila 2004), Qumran literature or Dead Sea Scrolls (Kugler 2002; Arnold 2006), or the Gospel of Mark (DeMaris 2014, 116–19).

Bell's categories not only provide the analytical tools for better understanding ritual; they also promote critical reflection on the way ritual is conventionally analyzed. In the case of ancient Christian baptism, for instance, most scholars label it a rite of passage (e.g., Thomassen 2003), often without making an argument for doing so (e.g., Spinks 2006, xii). But there are good reasons to question this classification (Lawrence 2009). Baptism did not mark transition between statuses *within* a life cycle, as a rite of passage does. Nor is there evidence from the first centuries of the elaborate and lengthy procedures that attend rites of passage in traditional societies (DeMaris 2008, 18–20). Agnes Choi presents the problems attending the widely accepted classification of baptism as a rite of passage and, inspired by Bell, offers an alternative view (Chapter 4). A more illuminating way to consider baptism, she contends, is as a political rite, Bell's sixth category. While perhaps puzzling at first glance, this alternative interpretation of baptism would surprise no one who has reflected on the implications of the baptismal act when it occurred in the Roman Catholic churches of Soviet-era Poland.

In addition to Bell's sixfold taxonomy, contributors to this book make use of other classification schemes to make sense of the ritual or rituals they consider. In his chapter on honoring the divine (Chapter 1), Jonathan Schwiebert introduces the work of Erving Goffman on the notion of deference expressed in interaction ritual to help the reader understand the various ways inhabitants of the ancient Mediterranean world—Christ-followers, Judeans, or polytheists—approached and sought the favor of their god or gods. Goffman's concept of deference falls into two kinds of interactions: presentational or approach rites and avoidance rites. This binary enables Schwiebert to organize ancient ritual action: Salutations, praise, dedications, prayers, offerings, sacrifices, and festivals—the positive aspect of honoring the divine—comprise presentational rituals. Preventing sacrilege and desecration, remedying pollution and impurity, and showing care in how one approaches the divine constitute avoidance rites. Equally useful classifications appear elsewhere in this book, such as in Chapter 9. There Richard Ascough considers ritual change or alteration on a scale running from minor (ritual modification) to major (innovation). Likewise, Richard DeMaris examines ritual transgression in Chapter 8 from the standpoint of whether a new and socially offensive ritual is coercively imposed or voluntarily embraced and practiced. The chapter also employs an active-versus-passive binary: whether ritual transgression lies in noncompliance—failure to carry out a culturally mandated ritual—or in active violation—calculated taboo breaking.

Context is (almost) everything

As many theorists have noted, the social or cultural context of a ritual is crucial for determining its significance. Especially important is ritual context, that is, the ritual world in which the ritual under consideration emerged and with which it interacted. Often a new ritual is a modification of an existing ritual. Studies of early Christian rituals have generally isolated Christian rituals from their cultural context and considered them primarily or exclusively in relation to a theological framework. Baptism, for instance, is typically interpreted in terms of eschatology, Christology, or soteriology rather than as a ritual in and of itself and as one ritual in a network of rituals. A case in point is Everett Ferguson's nearly thousand-page treatment of baptism. It considers Greco–Roman ritual water use in a mere twelve pages and Jewish ritual water use in a scant twenty-two (Ferguson 2009).

Contributors to this book agree that considering cultural context is crucial for coming to a full understanding of ritual and that comparison of Christian rituals with their ritual counterparts in the ancient Mediterranean world is essential for illuminating them. Examples of such contextualization, a primary task of the book, are many:

- In Chapter 1 Jonathan Schwiebert locates the ancient Judean and Christian means of honoring God in the wide spectrum of ways the ancients honored the divine by identifying the common elements among them. Introducing the social–scientific notions of general reciprocity and deference allows him to

find the common ground between rituals as varied as temple building, animal sacrifice, prayer, and house church meals. At the same time, Schwiebert notes that what he calls the "ceremonial idiom" for showing deference to the divine varied considerably across the Mediterranean world. In the case of Judeans, whose central temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE, and Christians, who resisted participating in animal sacrifice, alternative ways of honoring the divine had to be developed.

- In Chapter 2 Steven Muir introduces scholarship about breathing practices across several cultures as a basis for assessing the deeply emotional expression of intimacy with the divine captured in the phrase "Abba, Father," which the apostle Paul reports and deals with at two points in his letters. Likewise, in treating Paul's mention of spiritual adoption (by God the Father) at several points in his letters, Muir turns to Roman adoption practices as the best context for making sense of Paul's language.

- In Chapter 3 Ritva Williams offers readers a survey of the many ways the denizens of the ancient Mediterranean world, be they Greeks, Etruscans, Israelites, Romans, or Christ-followers, sought divine knowledge. These means included knowledge gained by agents—prophets, seers, et al.—in an alternate state of consciousness (ASC) or from non-ASC techniques of divination, such as observing astral phenomena—comets, eclipses, etc.—or casting lots. "Jesus and his earliest followers," she notes, "were thoroughly enculturated in this world, using common means of accessing divine knowledge to construct an alternative set of power relations." Williams' contextualizing of early Christians' divination shows that it was distinctive not so much in ritual technique as in application and result: rather than confirming, and conforming themselves to, existing power relations, that is, the Roman imperial structure, Christians utilized rituals to create alternative communities to that dominant structure.

- In Chapter 4 Agnes Choi's focus on baptism as a water ritual allows her to consider it alongside other water rituals of the day: Roman bathing practices and Judean purificatory washings. Such comparison allows Choi to see "more clearly the boundaries separating these groups." To the extent that baptism differed from these other ritual uses of water, it contributed to Christian self-definition.

- In Chapter 5 Erin Vearncombe argues that scholars of the ancient Roman world would do well to look at the regulation both of circles of Jesus followers and Greco–Roman associations with a view to understanding how the simple rituals around dining and dressing were effective at fostering community bonds and a common disposition.

- In Chapter 6 Nicola Hayward considers Christian funerary iconography in the context of Roman commemorative artifacts and practices: ancestral masks and busts, funerary portraiture, and funerary rituals such as festivals.

- In Chapter 7 Jason Lamoreaux pushes scholars of the apostle Paul and the Christian community at Corinth to broaden their approach to the debate about eating idol meat reflected in 1 Corinthians. The debate over dining

practices there was not simply between Paul and rival Christian parties in Corinth; it included authorities who oversaw dining taking place in Corinth's many temples, meals in which some Corinthian Christians were participating.

- In Chapter 8 Richard DeMaris contends that a ritual's social context is crucial for determining when a ritual triggers conflict. Accordingly, placing early Christian rituals in their social and historical contexts is essential for deciding when and how they were socially transgressive. His chapter also explores occurrences of ritual transgression across several cultures and in various historical settings as a way of determining what motivated it.

- In Chapter 9 Richard Ascough begins with existing Jewish/Judean practices as his point of departure for examining three rituals: purification by water, prayer, and meals. A case in point is the so-called last supper, which the Gospel of Luke identifies as a Passover meal. Yet, in the course of relating the events at table, Luke presents the reader with a significantly modified Passover, one at which the focus is the Kingdom of God and the new covenant connected with it. Likewise with the temple in Jerusalem as it is depicted in Luke: While it remains central in the narrative, its ritual function shifts. It is no longer a place of sacrifice but one of prayer.

These examples, which also serve as short chapter summaries, reflect a consensus among the contributors that the more a Christian ritual is treated in context—whether set alongside other Christian rituals, the vast array of Greco–Roman rituals, or rituals across cultures—the more light is shed on that particular ritual and early Christian ritual life in general.

Closing comments on terminological variety

Some concluding words about scholarly common ground and vocabulary—and especially the lack thereof—will further orient readers to the chapters that follow. Common ground includes the use of the same English translation of the Bible, namely the New Revised Standard Version, whenever contributors quote the New Testament. Contributors also agree that there is no dispute over what one calls the Roman Empire or the Hellenistic empires that ruled in the eastern Mediterranean after Alexander, until Rome eventually absorbed them: the Seleucids in the Middle East, the Ptolemies in Egypt.

After that, however, consensus breaks down. Contributors vary in how they refer to key subject matter in the field of New Testament studies (reproduced in italics below). Five constellations of terms deserve attention:

- *god*, *God*, *gods*, *the One God*, *the Jewish God*, *YHWH*, *god of Israel*, *God of Abraham*, *Isaac*, *and Jacob*. The English language has customarily distinguished the "Judeo–Christian" god from other gods by capitalizing god, hence, God. Many scholars consider this to be Christian or Jewish or monotheistic bias, and have moved to more neutral language or chosen to adopt vocabulary closer

to what one finds in the biblical text when it refers to God. (YHWH is the consonantal form of God's name in Hebrew.) Along these same lines, many scholars have replaced the term pagan with polytheist or polytheistic, which refers to a devotee of, or devotion to, several gods.

- *Jews*, *Judaism*, *Jewish*, *Judean*, *Judaean*, *Septuagint*, *Diaspora*. Many scholars would say that Judaism, as a religion institutionally defined by the rabbinate and syna-gogue, did not emerge until the third century CE at the earliest. It is therefore historically inaccurate to use the terms Jews, Judaism, and Jewish to refer to an earlier time. On the other hand, Judaism had historical roots in ancient Palestine running back hundreds of years. Accordingly, Jews and Jewish are used in almost all translations of New Testament documents, even though the latest documents are earlier than 150 CE. Many scholars follow these transla-tions, as do some contributors to this book. Others opt for Judean (or Judaean), which refers to the region of Judea in Palestine, a term that emphasizes geog-raphy and ethnicity. The whole matter is complicated by the migration of Judeans outside of Judea—called the Diaspora—and the translation of their Hebrew- and Aramaic-language scriptures into Greek: the Septuagint. Is it appropriate to call Greek-speaking Judeans living outside Judea Judeans? Or is Jews the better term? These and other, related questions are fully addressed in Cohen 1999, Berquist 2006, Harland 2009, and elsewhere. The answers vary.

- *the Temple*, *The Temple*, *Jewish Temple*, *Second Temple*, *Jerusalem temple*, *Second Temple Judaism*. Central to the ancient Israelite people was the temple in Jerusalem, also referred to as Solomon's temple or the first temple, to distin-guish it from the second temple. Many decades after the conquest of Israel and the destruction of that temple (586 or 587 BCE), a second one was built. It, too, was destroyed, in this case by the Romans in 70 CE. The period between the building of the second temple and its destruction is standardly referred to as second temple Judaism, even by scholars who opt for Judean and Judeans instead of Jewish and Jews.

- *Jesus adherents*, *Jesus followers*, *Jesus movement(s)*, *Christ cult*, *Christ groups*, *Christ-adherents*, *Christ-followers*, *Christ movement(s)*, *Christians*, *Christian*, *Christianity*, *Christianities*. Much like Judaism, Christianity was in embryonic form until the third century. There were also various, competing forms of it from the very beginning. Some scholars like to acknowledge that variety by using the term Christianities instead of Christianity. A good number of New Testament scholars, perhaps the majority, now refer to early believers and their religious identity in the early centuries (first and second centuries CE) with one of many terms above, not as Christian and Christianity. A consensus about the most appropriate terms is unlikely to develop soon.

- *assembly*, *Jesus-assembly*, *church*, *house church(es)*, *congregation*, *circle*, *group*, *Christian community*. Very different from the hierarchical institution of the fourth century CE and later, early groups of Christ-followers took many forms, all relatively simple, which they adopted from existing Greco–Roman institutions. Scholars are keen to emphasize the local and rudimentary nature of these groups, and

try to capture their character in a variety of terms. In the early centuries it is anachronistic to talk about The Church as though it were a monolithic institution.

Rather than standardizing vocabulary across the chapters, it seemed best to leave the variety in place and alert readers to it and the reasons for it. Doing so gives a sense of the ongoing, healthy debate among scholars who study the New Testament, Christian origins, and ancient Mediterranean religions. Moreover, this terminological variety resonates with the wide array of ritual theories deployed in this book.

Notes

1   This definition reflects the consensus reached in the classroom by students I have worked with on ritual in the last two decades.
2   Jan Platvoet has assembled scholarly definitions of ritual from 1909 to 1991 (Platvoet 1995, 42–45). Wary of trying to define ritual, Ronald Grimes offers a list titled "Family Characteristics of Ritual" and considers the features of ritual under an extensive table titled "Elements of Ritual, Expanded" (Grimes 2014, 194 and 237–41). He provides an extensive list of definitions formulated by scholars in appendix 1 of *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (2014).
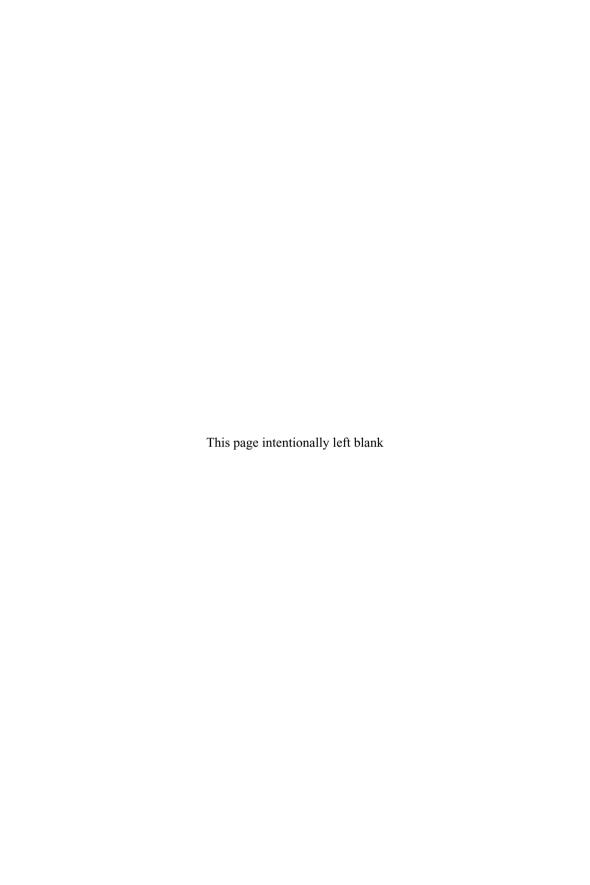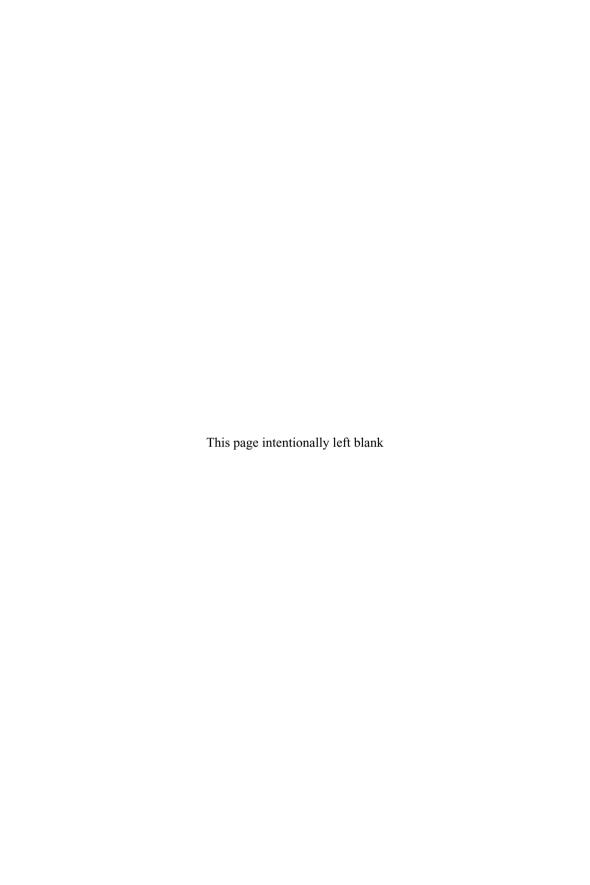
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PART I

Interacting with the divine

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1

HONORING THE DIVINE

Jonathan Schwiebert

"Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.'"

(Acts 17:22–23)

The first Christian communities struck root in a world dense with ritualized honor of the divine, just as Athens was thick with "objects of worship." But most of the marks of that honor have become foreign and even invisible to modern readers of the New Testament, to a degree that would have puzzled early Christians like the apostle Paul, pictured in this excerpt from Acts appealing to the Athenians' practices. This chapter aims to recapture these traditional ways of honoring the divine, which were woven into the fabric of ancient lives, and then to articulate briefly how Jewish and Christian ways of honoring God in the first century can be situated in that tradition.

Reciprocity and honor

From an ancient person's point of view, humans fell near the bottom of a very unequal pecking order. Greeks told stories of Olympian gods, demigods, and half-human heroes. Romans repeated many of the same stories, associating the planets with celestial beings of great power, and speaking of lesser powers (like the *genius*) much closer to home. Judeans in the Roman period spoke of angelic beings who carried messages and commands to and from a supremely powerful God. In all these systems, humans were often subject—even prey—to vastly more powerful sentient beings.

Most of us, then as now, concern ourselves at some level with the question of who can help us achieve our goals, and who can hinder us. This is especially true

when it comes to high-status and powerful people. We tend to avoid high-status people who can do us the most harm, but if we have to interact with them, we treat them with delicacy, taking pains to stay on their good side. Sometimes, though, powerful people are on our side, or at least can help us if we manage to cultivate their favor, communicate our needs, and give them some kind of compensating return. In very rare instances, a bond of affection might form, but typically the further apart the social statuses, the less likely affection will be a defining trait of the relationship. Admiration is a more typical emotional bond, but more common than both is a certain kind of fear or respect.

From these obvious social facts, we can gain insight into ancient practices that honor the divine, those powerful beings almost all ancient peoples acknowledged to exist and to wield significant, often unpredictable, influence on human affairs. There are two concepts in play here: one is the idea that certain kinds of actions can give honor to sentient beings, and the other is the exchange system that makes honor worth giving at all.

Take the exchange system first. Scholars of the period informed by the social sciences have identified a distinctive form of exchange called "general reciprocity," and it was pervasive in the social institutions of our period. General reciprocity is exchange between unequal or "asymmetrical" parties, for example between teachers and students, patrons and clients, the rich and the poor. Here the recipient of favors "cannot repay like with like" but instead "offers homage and loyalty or political support or information," giving "allegiance" or "discipleship" to the benefactor (Stegemann and Stegemann 1999, 36). Then as now, a powerful benefactor could give exactly what was needed to a needy supplicant, who would never be able to pay back the gift except by publicly honoring the benefactor for his or her generosity.

By analogy, divine beings were patrons with large numbers of human "clients," sometimes whole cities and regions of them, all dependent on the divine being's good favor. Honors given to such beings "were not a way of buying the gods, but of creating goodwill from which humans might hope to benefit in the future" (Price 1999, 39). Human clients asked the gods, who tended to be seen as more generous than powerful humans, for "daily needs—food, protection, comfort, strength, assistance—in addition to those things which only the gods could deliver—great crops, health, and most frequently, salvation" (Crook 2004, 76; see also Scheid 2003, 147–58).

This kind of exchange works best where the lower-status person holds some desirable "good" he or she can bestow on the higher-status person, and especially where the exchange preserves the dignity of both parties. A gift that degrades the giver or the recipient does not come off in the same way as one that benefits both and preserves the dignity of both, even if that dignity is unequal. Respect or honor was, it turns out, just such a good that even the most powerful beings were thought to desire it.

Seen in this light, honoring the divine was a very reasonable course of action, even if the divine being in question might not be paying much attention to a

particular gift of honor. In the ancient cultures that surrounded the Mediterranean Sea, "what is fatal is if a god is overlooked" (Burkert 1985, 216), much as if you or I were to slight a powerful person by ignoring them at a public gathering. The risks of neglect loom larger than the costs of respect. One can even see this idea of respectful attentiveness and its opposite, neglect, at work in Paul's well-known critique of Gentile religious culture in Romans 1:18–25, where he accuses Gentiles of dishonoring God through their misguided temple rites: "though they knew God, they did not honor him as God, or give thanks to him" (1:21). Their neglect provokes divine punishment (1:18, 26–32).

This brings us to our other embedded concept: the kinds of actions that gave honor to divine beings. Many of these actions and gestures seem strange or bewildering to observers some two millennia after the fact, and none more so than sacrificial ritual, or "cultic" practice. Yet sacrifices lie close to the surface in ancient accounts set in Rome, Athens, Ephesus, Jerusalem, and Alexandria—virtually every region of the known world, the *oikoumene*. To take two regional examples, we find public displays of piety like Solomon dedicating a new temple by sacrificing "so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted" (1 Kings 8:5), or Chryses reminding Apollo of the many times he built shrines and burned "fat thigh-pieces of bulls or goats" (Homer *Il*. I, 40–45). This kind of often extravagant, conspicuous practice sits side-by-side in these texts with much humbler offerings. Mary and Joseph offer two pigeons in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22–24), or Telemakos pours a libation and invokes Poseidon as he joins a feast (Homer *Od*. III, 60–65), to fulfill what Homer calls "the appointed offering" or what Luke calls "what is stated in the law."

Hidden in these simple allusions is a whole set of gestures, implements, personnel, sacred sites, and more that made up the infrastructure of honoring the divine in the ancient world. Remarkably, as we will see, Mediterranean cultures shared many assumptions about how one should show proper respect for divine and semi-divine beings. And most often this respect was offered for one of the two purposes mentioned above: to stay on a dangerous entity's good side, or to cultivate a potential patron of great power. At some level, these two purposes were the same, even if one was about avoiding pain and the other about gaining a blessing. Either way, ritual participants employed traditional, tried-and-true methods of honoring divine beings in the hopes of satisfying their own felt needs and securing their own safety and prosperity.

Respect and etiquette

Displays of honor are ritualized. We humans make use of ceremonial behavior, postures of deference, rigid or archaic speech-forms and titles, and other ritualizations to display honor. For instance, we might bow our heads or our bodies, or speak with thees and thous in prayer, or clear a path for an important person, smiling in a self-effacing way. In an important sense, honor is as honor is displayed. You have no honor if no one displays honor toward you. And the more you are honored, properly and without parody, the more honored you are.

A pioneer in investigating such ceremonial displays of respect was the sociologist Erving Goffman, who writes:

> In all societies, rules of conduct tend to be organized into codes which guarantee that everyone acts appropriately and receives his due. In our society the code which governs substantive rules and substantive expressions comprises our law, morality, and ethics, while the code which governs ceremonial rules and ceremonial expressions is incorporated in what we call etiquette.
>
> *(Goffman 1967, 55)*

Key for our purposes is etiquette, or ceremonial rules. Such rules, as Goffman points out, are arbitrary, socially defined codes that have "their primary importance—officially anyway—as a conventionalized means of communication by which the individual expresses his character or conveys his appreciation of the other participants in the situation" (Goffman 1967, 54).

Goffman enumerates the range of "sign-vehicles or tokens which carry ceremonial messages":

- Linguistic (statement of praise or self-deprecation; tones of voice)
- Gestural (physical bearing)
- Spatial (e.g., right versus left)
- Task-embedded (demeanor of the person accepting and performing a task)
- Part of the communication structure (a person getting more attention or speaking more or less than others)

"All of the tokens employed by a given social group for ceremonial purposes may be referred to as its ceremonial idiom" (Goffman 1967, 55–56).

With the help of Goffman's list, an astute observer can begin to recognize certain ancient Mediterranean ritual activities as ceremonial idioms people displayed in an effort to give divine beings their due. Despite important regional variants, ancient persons recognized similarities in what Goffman calls ceremonial tokens across cultures and regions, even when they looked with suspicion or distaste on some other culture's peculiarities of custom (see Barton and Boyarin 2016, 128–29). Analytically, these tokens functioned as regionally distinct tools for cultivating good outcomes or diverting bad ones from various classes of divine and quasi-divine beings and forces.

One might consider the ways divine beings and forces were dealt with as an adaptable system of etiquette. In fact, historian John Scheid defines the Latin term *religio* as "a set of formal, objective rules, bequeathed by tradition," a "system of 'etiquette'" that "consists in 'cultivating' the correct form of 'social' relations with the gods, essentially by celebrating the rituals implied by the links that exist between the gods and men" (Scheid 2003, 22–23). The Latin term *pietas*, meanwhile, marked "dutiful respect toward members of one's family, others with whom one shares social relationships, and the norms of society" (Potter 1999, 125). Similarly, the

Greek words usually translated "piety" (*eusebeia*) and "reverence" (*sebomai*; Foerster 1971, 169–72, 175–85) closely connect to Goffman's concept of "deference," or "the appreciation an individual shows of another to that other" (Goffman 1967, 77). This appreciation typically takes the form of both "avoidance rituals" and "presentational rituals" or rituals of approach.

First, avoidance rituals place a sphere of deference around a person of high status. "Where the actor must show circumspection in his approach to the recipient, we speak of nonfamiliarity or respect" (Goffman 1967, 63); and this is a mark of what Goffman calls asymmetrical deference. As such, avoidance rituals are a component of general reciprocity. In the ancient system of divine honors, the worshiper was the actor and the divine being was the recipient. The worshiper showed respect by being on non-familiar or formal terms with the deity (respecting the sphere around that being) and by avoiding too much contact with the deity's name or possessions. An example in Judaism would be the avoidance of the divine name, including in the gospel of Matthew where the term "kingdom of heaven" often substitutes for "kingdom of God." Like piety more generally, this kind of avoidance ritual was also common in human interactions, heightened in the asymmetrical interactions of status-conscious Romans.

Alongside these avoidance rituals are presentational rituals in which the actor "concretely depicts his appreciation of the recipient," for example (in human interactions) by "salutations, invitations, compliments, and minor services" (Goffman 1967, 71–73). Goffman points out that these two kinds of deference (avoidance and approach) are in constant tension, and this seems to be true also when it comes to approaching and avoiding divine beings. Showing deference to divine beings involved observing unusual rituals of approach (including purification rites) and, once in the deity's presence, participating in unusual ceremonial actions and gestures that showed deference and respect. In some regions, similar (but rarely identical) ritual deference was shown to powerful human rulers.

A final concept worth noting is that deference rituals, of both kinds, carry an important social dimension. A person who commits to carry them out "becomes to himself and others the sort of person who follows this particular rule" (Goffman 1967, 50). Adjectives like "pious" (Greek, Latin), "righteous" (Hebrew Bible, New Testament), "religious" and "god-fearing" (USA) are awarded to individuals by others in this social sense.

Although most human societies are strongly concerned about honor and status generally, the ceremonial idiom for honoring divine beings usually differs from that used for lesser beings, such as parents, judges, kings, and strangers. To take an obvious example, when the Israelites handed down the commandment to "honor your father and mother" (Exod 20:12), they did not expect that honor to take the same form as the exclusive honor intended for the One God: "The LORD your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear" (Deut 6:13). The word worship often signals this distinction in English (see Exod 20:5), but Hebrew (e.g., fear, serve, prostrate), Greek (e.g., *eusebeia*, *sebomai*), and Latin (*pietas*, *religio*) had not developed exclusive jargon for divine honors. Terms like

service, reverence, and piety imply ritualized behavior that is recognized within a particular culture as performing honor to a social superior. Honor given to a divine being can be distinct in degree (one gives much more of the usual kinds of honor to the divine) or in kind (one gives a different *kind* of honor to the divine). In fact, in the cultures that were clustered around the Mediterranean Sea in the first centuries, divine beings were honored beyond humans of even the highest order both in degree and kind.

Public honors

Toward the close of the first century BCE, Antiochus I boasted of his piety in an inscription at his tomb:

> Adequate property in land and an inalienable income therefrom have I set aside for the ample provision of sacrifices; an unceasing cultus and chosen priests arrayed in such vestments as are proper to the race of the Persians have I inaugurated, and I have dedicated the whole array and cultus in a manner worthy of my fortune and the majesty of the gods. I have decreed the appropriate laws to govern the sacred observances thus established for everlasting, so that all the inhabitants of my realm may offer both the ancient sacrifices, required by age-old common custom, and also new festivals in honor of the gods and in my honor. … Because of the multitude of offerings and the magnificence of the celebration I have consecrated two additional days, and each of them indeed as an annual festival.
>
> *(Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae, 383; translated in Grant 1953, 22)*

Antiochus closed the inscription with a warning about neglect of the shrine and of the festivals he had enacted.

The inscription gives us a glimpse of the infrastructure of honoring the divine. Additional elements of that infrastructure come to light in other inscriptions, archaeological finds, and literary publications from the ancient period. Taken together, these examples of public honor fall into Goffman's category of presentational rituals and are well attested:

- the dedication of a temple site and construction (or repair) of facilities there; a temple site might be chosen for a variety of reasons, including a perceived divine manifestation (Burkert 1985, 84–87; Price 1999, 47–54; Scheid 2003, 60–73);
- decoration and care for images of the deity housed in the temple (Burkert 1985, 88–92, 228; Price 1999, 56–57; Scheid 2003, 181–82);
- the sacrifices performed at the temple site, which involved keeping track of the kinds of offerings (types of produce or animals) the deity prefers, appropriate gestures and behaviors during the ritual, the proper handling of blood and innards, and disposal of a carcass (see further below);

- festivals held at or near the shrine in honor of the deity (these often included a procession with the sacred image; recitation or enactment of important myths connected to the shrine or deity; and sometimes games or contests in honor of the gods) (Burkert 1985, 99–107; Parke 1977; Price 1999, 25–46; Scheid 2003, 48–59; Bernstein 2007, 222–34);[1]
- votive offerings, that is, dedication of items to the deity that were then placed within that divine being's shrine (Burkert 1985, 68–70; Price 1999, 58–63);
- maintenance of the priests and temple attendants (Burkert 1985, 96–98; Price 1999, 63–73; Scheid 2003, 132–45; Horster 2007, 331–1);
- purity rules: purification of persons and objects, and barring certain types of animals and persons from the sanctuary (Nihan and Frevel 2012).

Most of these items were essential to the existence of a temple or were tied up with its existence, even if some were more practical than others. All of them, together, cost meaningful resources in time and money. As the Antiochus inscription above attests, much of that support was underwritten from a public treasury.

For all these reasons, it is probably best to view the items above as ancient persons did: public, official systems for honoring the gods, both to cultivate their favor for a particular place and to avert their wrath from that place. Not coincidentally, Roman-era cities were often known for their particular temples and cults, such as Artemis in Ephesus or Asclepius in Epidaurus—or the Judean temple in Jerusalem. Like tourist sites today, these famous temples brought fame and revenue to the hosting cities (see Acts 19:21–41).

At the same time, smaller, less costly shrines and cults were common in most regions of the Greco–Roman world as well. Also, most cities permitted more private and esoteric honor of divine beings, with gods and goddesses often imported from various parts of the world. Even so, where there were temples, most of the features listed above are also attested. Whether sponsored by the city magistrates or not, whether funded by private or public funds, temples and shrines were systems for honoring the divine.

In Goffman's terms, these temple sites can be seen as acknowledged or approved locations where a divine being can safely be approached. In that sense, the sites inherently imply corresponding avoidance rituals. An explicit example is the concept of sacrilege, or inappropriate handling of things that belong to a divine being. Stealing votive offerings and treasures from a temple or desecrating a divine image are classic examples of behaviors that violated the divine sphere (Price 1999, 58–60, 136; Potter 1999, 125–28). Paul also evidently viewed robbing temples as a violation of piety (Rom 2:22). Notably, temples were often enclosed in a bordering wall or *temenos*, which must be crossed (as noted above) with care and in a purified state. These features imply the avoidance pole of deference, even though by their nature temples were sites approved for presentational rituals.

The inherent tension between approach and avoidance is illustrated in the humorous, exaggerated account of the so-called superstitious man by the ancient

Greek philosopher Theophrastus. In this sketch, Theophrastus describes a person always on the lookout for signs of divine wrath, and taking pains to avoid that wrath. His acts of honor include hand-washing, shrine-building, anointing sacred stones with oil, kneeling before sacred objects, performing rites to avert divine wrath or to purify a place touched by a divine being, avoiding contact with the dead or with a woman in childbirth, offering sacrifices, decorating his house in honor of a god, paying respect to a god or goddess who has visited his dreams, and washing in the sea (*Char.* 16).

All of these behaviors utilized the ceremonial idiom of divine honor. The man was superstitious, then, not because he participated in that ceremonial idiom, but because he did so excessively and in response to an unhealthy fretfulness. He was guilty, in Plutarch's words, of "the celebration of immoderate and overwrought, needless ceremonies" (*Alex.* 2.5–6; as cited in Barton and Boyarin 2016, 127). The Latin term *superstitio* carried much the same sense (see Barton and Boyarin 2016, 33–37). In Goffman's terms, the man's behavior imposes on a divine being, like a socially awkward person who, in trying to be scrupulously polite, breaks all kinds of rules in the process of welcoming and honoring a high-status person who otherwise would hardly notice him. Such behavior actually detracts from the high-status person's honor. Overly punctilious behavior "involves the gods in even the smallest matter" (Livy 27.23.2; as cited in Barton and Boyarin 2016, 36).

This breach of etiquette was all the more unacceptable because this tension had already been negotiated. In Greek legal inscriptions, often posted at the entrance to a sanctuary, "a person is told just how—in what physical respects—he must be pure in order to approach a given deity so as to offer sacrifice." As to the purification, "it is a matter of a person's fitness while worshipping" (Robertson 2012, 195)—that is, etiquette. Comparable rules, again, are found across the region, and their purpose may have been, in part, to define as clearly as possible when and how to approach a divine being without infringing on his or her sacred person.

Despite his awkwardness, the superstitious man does help us notice some less obvious symptoms of divine honor, such as the inner attitude of fear or reverence toward divine things (see Barton and Boyarin 2016, 15–38); the importance of smaller shrines on thoroughfares, at entrances, or on high places; and the handling of divine names, which includes honorific titles and secret names, as well as naming months after divine beings (Burkert 1985, 226; Graf 1997, 192).

The domestic sphere

Once we collect to one side the temple-related ways of honoring the divine, other practices emerge into view:

- prayers, invocations, words of praise directed to the divine being in one's home, place of work, or en route to some place;
- offerings presented to divine beings in the home or fields;

- decoration and honor of images in the home or at a crossroads;
- obedience (in one's daily life) to laws divine beings set down.

Beginning with the last item, we can surmise that temple worship, that is, official honor given to the gods, was more or less interwoven with the everyday world and with domestic life. Each element in this list derived from, paired with, or influenced that official system of honors.[2] The average inhabitant of an ancient Mediterranean city must have spent significant time honoring divine beings in their home and outside the official spheres of public temples. Yet a recognizable ceremonial idiom is evident there too.

Consider these examples from Roman domestic religion (Orr 1986, 1560–71):

- A housewife decorates the household hearth with garlands during a religious festival.
- A household's daughters tend the house's fire and offer sacrifices at the hearth to the goddess responsible for that fire.
- Inside their house, the family worships the deities responsible for their food stores.
- At the winter solstice, at a crossroads, certain families and family members make offerings of grain and produce to divine beings whose power is available to the family for various purposes. Wooden images of these beings in the home are decorated with spring flowers. In some houses, paintings depicting these divine beings decorate the walls.
- Someone inscribes a prayer to the household gods on the wall of their kitchen.
- An annual feast of a household god is celebrated with wine and honey cakes eaten by the participants, and the sacrifice of a pig.

These examples clearly connect to the kinds of honor shown to divine beings in the public spaces of the ancient world. The same ceremonial idiom is discernible in each. The concept of general reciprocity holds here as well. Domestic rituals of honor were "primarily a quest for the special protection of particular deities … The domestic cult demonstrated the reliance of the family for its maintenance and continuity on powerful groups of deities" (Orr 1986, 1559).

Some accounts of ancient religion have pitted the official, public sphere against the domestic sphere, and both again have been contrasted to elective cults and mysteries. In fact, official, public temples and rites coexisted for centuries with both the mysteries and domestic ritual, and proved very difficult to stamp out long after the rise of Christianity (Burkert 1985, 246). Ancient persons evidently believed in "giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to the gods what belong to the gods." And while they may have sought help from a domestic deity and solace from an exotic Egyptian goddess, these activities need hardly turn them away from giving due honors to the official, recognized deities that maintained the social order of the cities in which they lived (Price 1999, 108–25). In such a delicate matter as respect, it pays to spread your attentions to every powerful person in the room.

Sacrificial ritual

A conspicuous ritualized display of divine honors, especially in the public sphere, almost always involved the slaughter of an animal. Next to the building and maintenance of temples, sacrificial ritual stands out noticeably in the ancient records, and also has proven most puzzling to modern scholars. Modern theories abound regarding where this practice originated, but people alive in the first centuries largely took it for granted, not inquiring into its origins but restricting their curiosity to how best to use this ritual to aid their own personal, familial, civic, or imperial ends. Scholars, especially in the twentieth century, found blood sacrifice troubling, which spurred them to offer a range of exotic theories, usually centered on violence (Burkert, Girard, and Smith 1988). Ancient persons, however, regarded ritual sacrifice as almost commonplace, not exotic or notably violent. For instance, a careful study of Greek vase paintings found that ancient Greeks were far more preoccupied with who was present at the sacrifice (human or divine) and how pleased the divine being was by the gift; the actual killing of the animal was rarely depicted (Van Straten 1995, 186–92). This observation holds true also for biblical accounts of sacrifice, where procedural details are seldom given. For instance, Abel's offering, or Noah's, is simply said to please the Lord (Gen 4:4, 8:20–21; Heb 11:4; cf. Luke 2:22–24).

As a deference ritual of approach, a sacrifice (Greek *thysia*) was often a way of slaughtering meat for human consumption that at the same time acknowledged and paid honor to a divine being. Weighed against the risks of neglecting a powerful divine patron, the costs of the ritual component were relatively small: festive, ceremonial behavior, and a small portion (usually inedible) burned up on the altar. This same general principle holds for the libation (pouring out a small amount of wine) and the domestic pinch of bread at the hearth: a gesture of respect that costs little but could have large ramifications if neglected. The traditional Judean form of this everyday respect, a prayer of thanksgiving prior to eating, cost even less (Philo *Spec.* 2, 175).

Sacrificial ritual, then, was firmly embedded in the ancient ceremonial idiom for honoring the divine. Fortunately, enough about this practice has peeked through the written and archaeological record for us to recapture its contours. F. T. Van Straten, for instance, has recreated the "typical" Greek sacrificial process, based on ancient vase paintings (1995, 161–92): Assistants would lead the animal to the altar and bring along a special basket and a vessel of water. The basket had a unique shape and contained vital ritual objects: grains of barley, a band or ribbon for decorating the animal's head, a knife, and sometimes sacrificial cakes. Altars came in two distinct shapes: circular altars set directly on the ground, and rectangular altars set on a base. What accounts for this difference has so far evaded scholars (Van Straten 1995, 166–67). The officiant would wash his hands and then take the grains of barley from the basket. Next an assistant or the officiant took the knife from the basket and killed the animal, which was then cut into portions by an assistant. He would bring the god's portion of meat to the officiant, who laid them on the altar. An

assistant also prepared non-meat offerings (cakes, incense, etc.) and brought them to the altar in the basket. Meanwhile, an assistant skewered the innards on spits and roasted them over the altar fire. Finally, an assistant poured wine from a wine ladle into a cup held by the officiant. He would pour out the wine as a libation and say a prayer. The remainder of the animal would then typically be cut up for roasting and boiling, so the meat could be eaten by the human participants.

This sketch from Greek sources connects to ritual practices known from our other sources for sacrifices in the Mediterranean: purification with water prior to beginning the ritual, offerings of slaughtered animals (sheep, pigs, and cattle) as well as grain-based offerings (cakes), burning up part of the animal (typically not the choice cuts) as the god's portion, wine offerings, prayer, and meal celebration (Scheid 2007, 263–69; Leviticus; Josephus *Ant.* 3.9–11). Of course, there were differences between regions, and even within a single area there was variation keyed to particular occasions and settings and deities. Such differences are important: there was no one way to offer a sacrifice, and in ritual performance (as in deference more generally) small variations often carry outsized significance. However, like regional dialects, these differences were significant partly because they communicated in a shared language. When Judeans and Romans restricted who could conduct a rite, this heightened the honor or importance attached to that role: from head of a household or community, to dedicated ritual specialist, to hereditary ritual specialist. Variations like these, understood within the encompassing idiom, were often vitally important for local practice of the ritual and thus our interpretation of that ritual in a particular instance.

Sacrificial ritual belonged among the presentational rites of deference, rather than avoidance rites. This helps explain certain features of sacrifices and especially those rules stating when the deity wanted an offering, what that offering should be, what state of purity the person approaching should have, and the location where the offering should be made. All these stipulations governed the actor's approach to the divine recipient, ensuring that the sphere of honor around the deity was not violated. Meanwhile, as a presentational rite, sacrifices were almost always accompanied by honorific prayers that made clear the bond between the actor and the recipient, often to the point of flattery. Implied or stated in the flattering praise was a request for assistance, as in this example from Anatolia:

> You, O Sun-Goddess of Arinna, are an honored goddess. To you, my goddess, there are revered temples in Hatti, but in no other land are there any such for you. Only in Hatti they provide for pure and holy festivals and rituals for you, but in no other land do they provide any such for you. Lofty temples adorned with silver and gold you have only in Hatti, and in no other land is there anything for you.
> *(Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi 24.3+, as cited in Hutter 2012, 164)*[3]

Such prayers obviously aimed to cultivate the divine being's special favor for the human parties in the exchange, in this case the whole land of Hatti, where temples

and sacrifices and other honorific rites were performed for that divine being in exchange for particular assistance or blessings in general. A remarkably similar logic holds in some biblical texts (1 Kings 8:27–53; Psalm 48).

While scholars have focused on sacrifice, it was in fact only one ritual component of a much larger system of honoring the divine. This overarching ceremonial idiom was widespread in the Mediterranean world, though it varied regionally and even between deities and occasions, often for strategic reasons. Further, this ceremonial idiom, which centered on the temple in public and the household in the domestic sphere, made good sense in light of two basic concepts: general reciprocity (asymmetrical exchange) and the sociological notion of deference that governed (and still governs) social interactions also among human beings.

In other words, sacrificial rituals and temple rites more generally, far from being bizarre, were about as reasonable as any ceremonial behavior ever is.

Honors less divine

Although a ceremonial idiom for divine honor was broadly shared in the first few centuries, it is important to stress that small modifications within rituals have an outsized importance for participants in those rituals. Just as a small shift in vocal inflection might distinguish respect from sarcasm, or a bow might signal dependence or parody it, ritual performers involved in deference displays toward the divine would be attuned to variations both subtle and obvious. To illustrate this sensitivity, we can look first at the distinction between typical divine honors and those given to the emperor. In fact, a common misconception is that the Roman emperors were "worshiped" as gods, as divine beings. The reality was far more subtle.

Consider the second-century Roman writer Suetonius and his criticism of Julius Caesar. Caesar, he claims, "allowed honors to be bestowed on him which were too great for mortal man." The honors included provision for carrying his image among those of the gods: "temples, altars, and statues beside those of the Gods; a special priest, … and the calling of one of the months by his name" (Suet. *Jul.* 76; Gavorse 1959, 41–42). The author of Luke–Acts voices a similar criticism of Herod, who

> put on his royal robes, took his seat on the platform, and delivered a public address to [the people]. The people kept shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a mortal!" And immediately, because he had not given the glory [honor] to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.
>
> (Acts 12:21–23)

Neither Caesar nor Herod instigated these divine honors, and yet both are strongly criticized because they did not refuse them. The response of Suetonius and Luke is not unlike the outrage one feels toward a serious act of pollution, such as incest or eating a domestic pet. A deep cultural code has been offended. That code was embodied, in this instance, in acts and words of honor reserved for divine beings.

To avoid provoking this outrage, imperial honors made use of the subtleties of ritual display. For instance, a living emperor was not worshipped directly; instead, libations were poured to his *genius*. After death, an emperor could be deified but was not thought to wield supernatural powers like Jupiter; one did not ask the deified, deceased emperor for the usual divine favors of success or assistance. Sacrifices were made in the abstract, as marks of respect and to curry favor, to Rome and Augustus (now deified). "The whole Roman system turned on loyalty and under the principate the object of loyalty had become personalized in the emperor" (Liebeschuetz 1979, 77).

All of this made good sense within the pecking order: "Under the empire the peace of the Roman world and the well-being of the city of Rome was thought to depend … very largely on the actions of the emperor," so that "the gods' protection and support" must flow through him to everyone below (Liebeschuetz 1979, 64–65). The tangible ritual acts offered for the emperor's well-being and to honor his *genius* can be understood in this light. Wine and incense were part of a recognized Roman ritual vocabulary of divine honor when making requests or offering thanks; sacrifices followed by a procession, games, and a banquet also displayed and enacted public honors for divine beings, and drew the populace into participation. These were the sorts of divine honors on offer during the emperor's birthday and similar occasions (Liebeschuetz 1979, 80–82), and they fell an important hair's breadth short of outright worship of a living emperor.

Just as in other deference displays, then, the line between imperial honors and the ceremonial idiom of *divine* honors was negotiated and performed in moments of interaction, through subtle variation. Insisting on and recognizing such a distinction in turn allowed the early emperors to maintain that they were upholding traditional ritual, so important to the social order, even while they accepted signs of loyalty that reoriented the empire toward new imperial political power and status (Scheid 2003, 159–65).

Regional variation

Small distinctions in ritual, then, are tremendously important. An interpretation of a particular display of honor should take regional and context-specific variations into account. For example, unlike Judean festivals (Passover, Sukkot), Greeks and Romans honored the gods through public games at their festivals. These games included athletic competitions, music, drama, and oratory displays. The introduction of similar games in Jerusalem came off, to some, as a sacrilege there, rather than an appropriate divine honor (2 Macc 4:12–17). It disrespected the sphere of honor around the God of Israel (YHWH or Yahweh), disregarding his wishes, just as offering the wrong animal was seen as a "desolating sacrilege" (1 Macc 1:47, 54).

Other regional variations are equally important. Roman sacrificial practice, for instance, famously emphasized precise performance of the rites (Liebeschuetz 1979, 61; Orlin 2007, 58), whereas Greek and Judean practices were apparently less constrained by such rules, so that a Roman's scruples might seem excessive to

them—superstitious even. This is only one instance of many differences between Greek and Roman ways of honoring the divine (Price 1999, 148–58). In Egypt, meanwhile, purity practices for priests were relatively stringent; for example, the absence of hair on the body was uniquely important. But even here, the reason for purity was as expected: to avoid making the god angry "against his place," which would negatively impact Egypt, whereas keeping the god happy (claims one ancient text) "puts this country into its correct state" (Quack 2012, 120–22).

Variations in Judean ritual practice fell on this same spectrum, sometimes toward the center of typical (e.g., using priests, altars, purifications) and sometimes further out toward the edge of unusual or even unique. Ancient Greek and Roman authors recognized Judean sacrificial ritual as belonging to the same general ceremonial idiom, however unusual some of the particulars. Consider these biblical examples: Jacob anointing a sacred stone with oil to pay his respects after a dream visitation (Gen 28:18–22), the Israelites building God an elaborate shrine as an assured point of access (Exod 25–27, 35–40; 1 Kings 6), sacrifices prescribed for various offenses against God or the divine law (Lev 4–7), purification rules (Lev 12–15; Num 19), and special rules to set priestly officials apart (Num 8). The Israelites also knew a sacred calendar (Exod 23:10–18; Lev 23, 25; Num 28–29), and permanently barred certain classes of persons from their shrine (Lev 21:16–23). Most, if not all, of this ceremonial idiom was still intact during the lifetime of Jesus and his first followers (e.g., Mark 1:44; John 2:6, 13, 10:22–23; Acts 3:1).

Unusually, though, most Judeans only offered sacrifices at a single temple in Jerusalem.[4] Just as notably, Judeans did not sacrifice pigs, which were a favorite of some Greek and Roman deities. Apparently, water purification took on special significance among Judeans, even among those who did not have access to the temple. The resulting picture is one of a high degree of overlap with other Mediterranean cultures in the abstract, especially in the temple rites in Jerusalem, alongside a fair amount of variation in the particulars, especially for a Judean living any distance from Jerusalem.

In addition to these variations of practice, we should consider whether Judeans conceived of their ritual activity differently than other Mediterranean peoples. The point is disputed, especially when it comes to sacrificial practice and the notion of reciprocity. Was the Judean God appeased by pious acts? Was his favor cultivated by prayers, a temple, sacrifices, and flattering titles? Could he be obligated, even shamed, into helping his clients? Even the biblical texts seem divided on the point (1 Kings 8:28–53; Isa 1:10–17). One scholar argues that in Israel "Sacrifice was always seen to have an *exchange* value" (Finlan 2016, 23, 26; italics original). For him, "Sacrifices … are grammatically and practically linked to social acts of exchange, payment, and tribute" (Finlan 2016, 28). Others disagree. A complicating factor in this case is the root metaphor of "covenant," which entails a different exchange model than general reciprocity, although both clearly involve asymmetrical relationships. Even here, though, some would contend that reciprocity had made inroads as Judeans became Hellenized (Crook 2004, 79–88), to the extent that the apostle Paul considered his work of spreading the gospel an act of exchange with his powerful patron, God (Crook 2004, 113).

Whatever the case, similar questions about the reciprocity model could be raised about Egyptian, Babylonian, and Anatolian ritual practices, especially if we extend the analysis backward in time. What is clear in these cases, however, is that deference was shown to divine beings in each region, both through avoidance rituals and through positive acts of public and private honor. Apparently—and not surprisingly—different cultures interpreted the shared ceremonial idiom in different ways. Just as they adapted this idiom to particular divine beings at local sites, they also interpreted the idiom in ways that suited their own cultural forms—officiousness, friendship, tribute, and so on. In the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, general reciprocity became the dominant framework for interpreting this ceremonial idiom. But how far its influence reached into the regions the Greeks and Romans conquered is a point that deserves ongoing consideration.

The loss of the Jerusalem temple

A final dimension of displaying honor in Erving Goffman's analysis is that rules and acts of deference can go awry, intentionally or not. For instance, a person might misclassify the status of another party or may take liberties that the recipient finds offensive. In fact, honor is prone to all the usual manipulations and misfires of behavior: ironic displays, understated displays, embarrassing display by the wrong party or because of a misunderstanding, and a full menu of slights, flattery, and general neglect (Goffman 1967, 85–90).

Colonized Judeans exploited this dimension of deference in 66 CE: they declared their revolt from Rome by ceasing sacrifices for the welfare of Caesar. Political solidarity and rebellion were (and still are) marked ritually. This was not simply a symbolic gesture. In the ancient context, offering sacrifices for the well-being of Caesar was a show of honor, the highest honor Judeans were permitted (by divine law) to offer Caesar. Honor, as we have seen, is enacted in both small gestures and larger ones, by speech and by attention paid to particular shrines and particular ritual activities. Neglect is its opposite; intentional neglect is its extreme opposite. In fact, it is open dishonor.

Biblical scholars are well aware that the Judean revolt marked a turning point for both Jewish and Christian history. It falls directly between the apostle Paul's last days and the writing of virtually every other New Testament text, including the gospel accounts of Jesus' life. The crucial moment of the war, the one that changed the tides for both religious traditions, was the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 CE. This was a defeat that could have spelled the end of honor offered to the God of Israel. In the aftermath of the temple's loss, it might not have been immediately clear how and whether that God could be honored—or even if he deserved such honor. Many Judeans had believed sacrifices could only be offered at that temple. For them, with that site gone, the primary means of honoring the Judean God had suddenly been severed.

Fortunately for those involved, the earlier crisis of the Babylonian exile had left certain coping devices in place. Ritually, honor could still be rendered in prayer. But

prayer was, in that ceremonial idiom, an anemic substitute for the more complex, costly ritual system that involved the temple and its maintenance. Prayer was spoken but not otherwise embodied; it was "bloodless" and essentially free of expense. Family and communal meals, with their humble rites of thanksgiving, had also given a measure of honor to God. Unlike all other people's domestic rites, these would now have no corresponding public honors, even in a far-off homeland. Some of the Lord's festivals could be celebrated away from the temple, but they too now lacked the central sacrificial ritual, its temple, and its priests. Fasting and feasting could go on in a crippled, reduced form. And, finally, there were simply communal gatherings at which one read, recited, sang, and talked. Such activities, no matter how cherished, hardly measured up to the costlier and more public honors bestowed on the gods and goddesses elsewhere in the region.

In this crisis, those who still sought the favor of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob carved out alternate systems of honor. Scripture and its interpretation became a centerpiece for many. Meals rose in prominence, especially for Christ-followers; giving alms became a kind of rite honoring God, especially for Judeans. Sabbath observance, and Torah observance more generally, increasingly marked Judean identity in contrast to important branches of the Jesus movement (see the gospels). Meanwhile, Judeans and Christ-followers largely embraced a key ideal that predated the temple's destruction: exclusive honor to the One God. Conceptions of this God would be debated in the decades to come, gradually diverging as Judean and Christ-following communities came to define themselves as distinct. But for both, refusing to honor another god or gods would continue as an important, if ironic, way to honor God.

The difficulties for early Christians in redefining honor outside of the ceremonial idiom can be glimpsed already in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Acknowledging that there is really only one God "for us," Paul also notes that "there are many gods and many lords," and that an early Christian might honor such a being by eating food that has been dedicated to one of these gods—that is, by participating (however indirectly) in giving deference to another divine being before eating (1 Cor 8:1–13). For Paul, this could amount to eating at "the table of demons" and must be avoided (1 Cor 10:19–21). His solution pays attention to the human–divine interaction but not the social ramifications of that interaction: the implicit claim that the one performing deference to the gods was, thereby, a pious and respectable member of the larger society. This antisocial piety later proved a thorny issue for early Christians (see Tertullian *Idol.*), straining against the social pressure to give "honor to whom honor is due" (Rom 13:7).

A generation later, Gentile Christians, lacking any official warrant for abstaining from public and domestic rites, came to be labeled atheists, persons who honored no gods. Some Romans apparently found them rude and distasteful—understandably, perhaps, given the circumstances. Early Christian intellectuals pushed back, sometimes criticizing *all* sacrificial ritual, even the now-defunct Judean system. One Christian writer objects to Judeans "who imagine that they are … honoring [God] with these tokens of respect," namely sacrificial offerings (Diogn. 3.5; Holmes

2006, 295). But when he does this, he knows he is fighting against almost everyone (Diogn. 2–3). Another Christian writer similarly complains that the Judeans "almost like the heathen, consecrated him by means of the temple" (Barn. 16.2; Holmes 2006, 194). All these complaints come late, after the temple has been razed. They critique, not Judean practice of their day, but the ceremonial idiom of their Gentile neighbors—in fact, of the known world.

Looking back post-70, certain teachings of Jesus would stand out as guidance for approaching and honoring God: the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4; Did. 8), Jesus' teachings about proper prayer etiquette more generally (Matt 6:5–8; Luke 11:5–10, 17:7–10), his encouragements to ask freely and persistently (Matt 7:7–11; Luke 11:11–13, 12:32, 18:1–8), and the growing tradition of set prayers and other ritual elements for the all-important meal gathering (1 Cor 11:2–34; Did. 9–10, 14). Such traditions would emerge as reliable, approved attitudes and etiquette for approaching the divine Father without infringing his dignity. They offer the beginnings of an alternate ceremonial idiom, built up without a temple or sacrifices.

It was a breathtaking achievement, and so successful that after two millennia scholars have come to view the ancient ways of honoring the divine as strange, even bewildering. Yet with a little effort, readers today can recognize that ancient displays of honor, however arbitrary or strange, made intuitive sense to ancient Mediterranean persons, just as bowing, handshaking, averting one's eyes, or applauding make sense to us. If ancient displays like sacrifice and festivals were extravagant, that is a mark of the high regard in which performers held their divine beings.

The absence of temples and altars did not remove the need among Christians to show deference to the divine. That circumstance simply called for a radical revisioning of the ceremonial idiom for honoring God: how God's sacred dignity could be preserved through ritual and gesture, word and tone; and how and when God could best be approached for those very real needs humans continued to experience.

Notes

1   Festivals have much wider social functions than honor of divine beings; see esp. Handelman 1990; Burkert 1985, 225–46.
2   Orr notes many clear connections and cross-fertilizations between the household and imperial, civic spheres. One example is a household shrine in the shape of a miniature temple (1986, 1584–85), but these connections extend to names and concepts as well as rites (1986, 1560–75). The influence could be argued in either direction, perhaps, but ancient Romans likely viewed them as intimately connected without worrying much about which came first.
3   For a Greek example, compare Graf 1997, 189–90 (=*Papyri Graecae Magicae* IV.2785).
4   Sacrifices to the Lord were also offered at a temple in Leontopolis in Egypt, but with far less popularity than the favored site of Jerusalem (see Barclay 1996, 418–21).

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2

ACCESSING DIVINE POWER AND STATUS

Steven C. Muir

Introduction

I have chosen the phrase "accessing power" as a neutral descriptor for the ritualized actions I want to discuss (by contrast, see the issue of "magic" discussed later in this Introduction). Accessing divine power is a broad category. Each of the chapters in the first section of this book deals with aspects of accessing such power. Chapter 1 focuses on human actions to honor and please the gods and thereby access divine benefits. Chapter 3 examines a particular type of sought-for benefit: knowledge (usually of the future, though it could be of esoteric or mysterious aspects of existence). This chapter investigates accessing divine power through a detailed case study of an issue discussed in two Pauline texts. The intent of this case study is to demonstrate the utility of ritual theory and analysis to raise questions about a poorly understood ritual activity in Pauline communities, and to find significant grounds to propose that Paul's adoption theology arose as a response to that ritual activity and kept it under control.

Chapters in this book position early Christianity entirely within a Greco–Roman cultural context. Earlier scholarship often made incorrect assumptions about early Christians: that they saw themselves as citizens of heaven more than earth, that they avoided "magical" practices and only engaged in spiritual activities, thus that they were quite unlike their polytheist neighbors. This book generally and this chapter in particular challenge that assumption. Roman rituals were largely oriented towards benefits in this world. Thus, the focus of benefits sought by early Christians in accessing divine power will be considered from a this-world perspective, in other words, tangible rewards in this life.

Some scholars, especially those writing scripture commentaries, have a preconceived notion of what is theologically "true," and therefore either ignore or fail to take seriously other perspectives. Successful New Testament interpretation

necessitates developing a healthy imagination and the ability to put oneself in a variety of ancient shoes. It also requires putting aside a desire to shoehorn texts into an overall systematic theological framework which might screen out very real anomalies, experiments, and divergent practices. People in the ancient world did not seek to be "heretical." That is a label employed in a polemical sense by their opponents, who sought to marginalize them. "Wise, fearless, inspired" – that is how people would have characterized themselves. I have *not* approached the data by asking, "How were these people wrong?" but rather "What were these sincerely religious people doing, why were they doing it, and in particular how did they do it?"

Some of the rituals considered under the heading "accessing divine power" might be called "magic" in older scholarship. Many scholars working in the study of ancient texts have come to recognize that terms such as "magic" or "miracle" involve subjective assessments of value (i.e., "we" do miracle, "they" do magic; "we" are good people and "they" are bad). I avoid ascribing any good/bad, correct/incorrect, orthodox/heretical assessment to the actions in view. While such evaluations may be useful in a theological framework, they are unhelpful in digging out the issues which lie behind New Testament texts. Thus, as noted above, the more neutral phrase "accessing divine power" is used here. That being said, while I have tried to avoid labeling the ritual activity I am assessing as "magic," I find that I cannot entirely avoid use of the term, because it is in data labeled as "magical practices" that we may find analogues to the ritual I am examining.

In addition to the emphasis on considering this-world benefits, two other points should be mentioned at the outset. These are determinative in the argumentation of this chapter. First, we need to consider the issue that action often precedes thought; experience and feeling often come before interpretation. This is a point raised by the theory of Clifford Geertz. Second and related to this point is that we need to consider that ritualized experiences of an unusual nature (dramatic, emotional, exhilarating, empowering, visionary) may have been prized as benefits in and of themselves – apart from any other result – and may have been a catalyst for later interpretation.

The thesis of the case study

I estimate that in some early Jesus assemblies known to Paul, members are performing ritual actions involving deep breathing or inarticulate sighs and moans which produce powerful emotional reactions. At first, the exhilaration or deep feelings resulting from these rituals is pleasurable in itself. Later, group members propose that they had achieved divine power or had become divinized (god-like). I suggest that the experience came first, and interpretation followed.

These actions are happening at two centers: Rome (Romans 8, especially 8:14–17) and Galatia (Galatians 4, especially 4:6). The issue in those two centers is the same – a ritual cry of "Abba" – as is the result – Paul's adoption theology. Paul wants to manage and control these situations. He views them as problematic or having the potential to be problematic, since they involve people seizing divine power through

their own efforts rather than receiving it as a gift from God (as Paul would want them to think). I assert that Paul's statements and theology arise in response to these situations. He wants to domesticate the issue, do damage control, and helpfully explain the situation in ways that will shape the behavior. This thesis is a new way to understand Paul's adoption theology.

Here are the specifics of the thesis. I find two phases of a ritual. Phase 1 involves deep breathing by group members, perhaps in an attempt to take in the spirit of God (see discussion of this point in the "we are sons and background" sections). There are no specific words at this point, though there are sighs or groans and an emotional release. We see evidence of this stage in Romans 8:23 "we … groan inwardly" and 8:26 "sighs too deep for words." The result of this ritualized activity is exhilaration and a feeling of power. I estimate that the ritual at this point is entirely or at least largely experiential and non-cognitive. It may involve manipulation of autonomic nervous systems through ritual and meditation (see discussion on breathwork in the "ritual theory" section). The experience is distinct, and it is valued.

Phase 2 involves interpretation by group members, and then adaptation of the ritual in light of their experience and their explanation of its significance. The experience is interpreted as being filled with God or becoming god-like, achieving divinization, or becoming a son of God. Thus, we see that ritual is not static but can be responsive to ideas and values of the community. On the dynamic nature of ritual, see Hüsken and Neubert 2012, 2, and Lamoreaux Forthcoming, 3. As I will demonstrate, divinization or claims to divine sonship were part of the conceptual landscape in the first century, so it is legitimate to investigate such claims here. The first step of this second phase may have been vocalization of the Aramaic word "Abba" (Father). Whether this step was stand-alone, or whether the word "Abba" was immediately joined with the Greek phrase *ho patēr* ("Father", essentially an explanation of the Aramaic), is open to conjecture. A case can be made from a ritual studies perspective that the Aramaic "Abba" came first, and then the saying was expanded to include the Greek. I will offer rationales for that scenario below. What we can say conclusively is that in Rom 8:15 and also Gal 4:6 we see the fully-developed version of the ritual – "we cry Abba! Father!"

Ritual theory

First, we consider the following issue noted in ritual studies: at times, ritual *action* may precede concept. The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz estimates that "it is out of the context of concrete acts of religious observance that religious conviction emerges on the human plane" (Geertz 1966, 28–29). Here, Geertz suggests that we should not assume that a ritual always is an expression of previously existing concepts or beliefs of a community. Geertz allows for the possibility that ritual comes first, shaping ideas and creating new concepts. Geertz urges us to take seriously the *experiential* aspect of ritual. From a psychological perspective, experience is pre-cognitive, and experience may generate any number of interpretations. The theory of Geertz also suggests that the ideas or rationales behind actions, particularly ritual actions, may be inchoate or not well defined conceptually at first.

Ritual is a complex phenomenon. In ritual studies, there is a growing appreciation of that complexity and a view that no one explanation or function of ritual will suffice. Ronald Grimes 1992 has a nuanced review of the questions "are ritualists necessarily pre-critical?" (1992, 28–35) and "is ritual necessarily meaningful?" (1992, 35–38). The answers to these questions are debated in the academy. That being said, several scholars of ritual theory are in line with the assessment of Geertz. Claude Lévi-Strauss defined ritual as, "words uttered, gestures performed and objects manipulated, independently of any gloss or commentary that might be authorized or prompted by these three forms of activity" (1981, 671). Fritz Staal estimates that ritual is best understood in terms of action rather than interpretation, going so far as to assert, "ritual is pure activity, without meaning or goal" and has intrinsic value in and of itself among its practitioners (1979, 9). Dan Sperber calls ritual "evocative" and "stimulative," in an experiential rather than cognitive way (1975, 118). Gilbert Lewis notes that:

> it may be more helpful to think generally of what happens in ritual in terms of stimulation rather than communication … we do not "decode" it to make sense of it or understand it. We are affected by it.
>
> *(Lewis 1980, 34)*

Grimes labels ritual knowledge "tacit" (rather than cognitive) and describes it as "preconscious, implicit and embodied" (1992, 37). Frank Gorman notes that "ritual may generate narrative and story" (1994, 23). Richard DeMaris similarly asserts that rites can be "generative and creative" (2008, 8). Here we may also consider the ineffable (non-verbal) quality of mystical experience and the related field of ritual experience. William James provided the classic statement on the issue in 1902 and it remains a widely accepted assessment:

> The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression; that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced.
>
> *(1902, 538)*

On this, see also Staal: "mysticism … points to a pre-linguistic state which can be induced by ritual, by recitation, by silent meditation on mantras, or by other means" (1979, 20).

Next, we turn to the fields of psychology and physiology. Human consciousness is a complex network of conscious and autonomic systems. These systems are distinct but work together in a variety of feedback loops. Studies on mysticism or ecstatic states find that intentional (i.e., conscious) actions such as meditation or ritual can push the autonomic systems beyond their usual thresholds. Out of these intense experiences (either hyperarousal or hyperquiescence) may arise feelings of exhilaration, loss of sense of bounded self, and/or unity with something higher or with everything. Here, see Eugene G. D'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg 1999,

and their earlier works of 1993a and 1993b. It is worth noting that the autonomic systems are pre-cognitive and experiential, whereas the central and frontal brain areas are the seats of cognition. Thus, we see an interplay between experience and interpretation. For a ground-breaking use of psychological theories of ecstatic states in Pauline studies, see Shantz 2009.

In reference to particular ritual activities, what is known as "breathwork" is a recognized technique which can lead to altered states of consciousness, and it involves controlled breathing either of a slow and deep or a rapid and rhythmic kind. See Kathryn Lee and Patricia Speier 1996; J. Scott Young, Craig S. Cashwell, and Amanda L. Giorando 2010; and Kylea Taylor 1994. Lee and Speier note that breathwork is a pan-cultural phenomenon, used by North and South American and African shamans, the Kalahari !Kung Bushmen, Zen and other Buddhist traditions, and yogis in the *Pranayama* school in India (1996, 336–37). Young, Cashwell, and Giorando add Chinese *chi* and Japanese *ki* work (2010, 113). They also state "sustained conscious breathing provided a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious," freeing up repressed emotions and facilitating altered states of consciousness (2010, 115). I suggest that the ubiquity of this phenomenon gives us a legitimate point of comparison with and possible explanation of the inarticulate groans mentioned by Paul, and any deep emotions or experiences of unitary state resulting from such acts.

A brief observation about Pauline studies

Some commentators (often operating from a theological perspective) give Paul a privileged or authoritative status. They assume that Paul is correct in his statements of religious matters, and in fact through alleged divine inspiration he has been granted a firm grasp of transcendent truths. This *a priori* assumption makes it difficult for those scholars to recognize weaknesses in Paul's arguments. Commentators may fail to take seriously the issues behind Paul's letters or the actions of Paul's opponents. It is commonly accepted by scholars that Paul's letters are "occasional" – that is, they arise in response to specific issues in particular communities. Yet, in some analyses, the occasion has been lost in the result as all attention is focused on Paul's response. I push the analysis back to the occasion itself – prior to whatever answer(s) Paul comes up with. And I see the occasion as a legitimate phase in itself, regardless of what Paul may think about it. As I suggest below, a shaky and convoluted argument by Paul may give us reason to see that he rather desperately is seeking to control a situation by whatever means he can muster.

To assist in the task of re-conceptualizing our understanding of Paul's role, I propose another model – that of the *bricoleur*. This charming French term came into English usage by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966, 16–22; cf. discussion in Derrida 1978, 284–87). Here is a definition of *bricoleur*, an appropriate description of Paul:

> the *bricoleur* (a handyman, jack-of-all trades and professions) exemplifies an approach to problem-solving in which each problem occasion is negotiated

> *in situ*. What is in each case addressed is not strictly predefined, even though a
> general objective (e.g., unlock a door, fix a broken machine) may provide the
> context for the undertaking. Through playful exploration (rather than deduc-
> tive/analytic reasoning) of what is possible, the *bricoleur* adjusts past solutions,
> reframes, or manipulates technical memories of past events and projects to
> make them bear upon or even redefine the problem at hand.
>
> *(Kallinikos 2012, 75)*

I am not the first to apply the *bricoleur* interpretive label to Paul. My Canadian col-
league William Arnal notes the following (though Bill and I arrived at this estima-
tion independently):

> Paul, now, is understood not as a purveyor of ideas whose content he has
> received from others and passes along, but as a *bricoleur*, who uses mythic con-
> tent, forms, and fragments as he encounters them, to construct novel notions
> that address his own problems, issues, and circumstances.
>
> *(Arnal 2011, 79–80)*

What the above suggests is that in analyzing the writings of Paul, we may consider
the very real possibility that his words are creative and *ad hoc* responses to current
issues. He may not always have had a pre-existent or over-arching theological point
– in fact, I will argue that in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians, previously
existing ritual actions shaped Paul's adoption theology and that his theological con-
cepts arose in response to the situation. In other words, ritual experimentation may
have been the catalyst for Paul's theology, and Paul's explanations and statements
were strategies to deal with these situations.

We are sons – ritual experiments in Rome and Galatia and Paul's response

As I noted above, some members of Jesus assemblies in Roman and Galatia have
been engaging in ritual acts. We see evidence of the ritual in its developed phase,
a deeply emotional group prayer resulting in a cry of "Abba!" or "Abba, Father!"
We speculate (based on Paul's reference to sighs and groans) that there had been an
earlier, non-verbalized phase of the ritual.

Paul refers to this act in two letters, Romans and Galatians (usually dated to the
mid-50s CE). In each case, the way he refers to the act suggests a phenomenon which
predates his letter and which is well known in the assemblies. Further, whereas the
assembly in Galatia was established by Paul, the one in Rome was in operation apart
from Paul, and in fact he reveals that he has not yet visited the group (Rom 1:11).
The city of Rome was the capital and center of the Roman Empire, and Galatia
was a region in the east Roman province of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Thus,
we have in view a phenomenon which is relatively dispersed and not limited to
Pauline-founded assemblies. Perhaps this is a grassroots sort of activity.

The section in Romans dealing with the Abba cry is midpoint in the epistle. It is sandwiched by two largely cohesive and interrelated sections: an extended discussion of judgment and law (Torah) versus faith, grace, and righteousness (chapters 1–7) and a shorter discussion of the role and fate of Israel and the Gentiles (chapters 9–11). The epistle concludes with a section treating a variety of community issues (chapters 12–16). A number of distinctive features are evident in chapter 8: a rich and varied discussion of "spirit" issues, the introduction of a distinctly Pauline concept (assembly members have been adopted by God), and a heavy emphasis on the end-times. While chapter 8 is somewhat integrated into the surrounding discussions, its distinctive features suggest that a particular issue has provoked Paul's discussion, and been the catalyst for his statements.

In Galatians (probably an earlier letter), we see a similar, albeit briefer, treatment of adoption and sonship themes. As was developed more extensively in the epistle to the Romans, in Galatians we see Paul's discussion of Judean versus Gentile, circumcision and Torah versus faith, slavery versus freedom (chapters 1–4). In chapter 4, there is a digression into the adoption motif, although Paul skillfully weaves that into the slavery/freedom dichotomy he has established earlier. Galatians concludes with a discussion of flesh versus spirit (chapter 5) and community matters (chapter 6).

Paul and his groups consider that they are living in the eschaton (the last days) prior to God's judgment and the return of Christ (cf. Gal 6:14–15). If the book of Acts (a later New Testament document) can be allowed to provide some background, evidently some Christ-followers considered that charismatic (Spirit-prompted) activity was a sign or validation of the end-times and their status as agents of the eschaton. See Peter's citation of Joel 2:28–29 in Acts 2:17–18. Thus, we may reasonably suppose that Paul values and wants to encourage Spirit-activity, yet at the same time he needs to manage and control it. I suggest that Paul references the Spirit of God as a rhetorical strategy, to limit the agency of the ritual actors. When Paul speaks of the gifts or manifestations of the Spirit, he is always concerned that they be used for altruistic and group-building purposes rather than self-promotion. We see this in Paul's contrast between works of the flesh versus fruits of the Spirit in Gal 5:19–23. We see an extended discussion of this issue in 1 Cor 12–14, where Paul stresses that the gifts of the Spirit are to be used for the common good (*sumpheron*, 1 Cor 12:7) and the building up of the group (chapter 14) rather than the ends of individuals.

Paul, I suggest, values aspects of the ritual experience known as the Abba prayer. He probably can accept the issue of divine sonship, but he fears where the interpretation could lead – namely to self-aggrandizing claims by people that they themselves have achieved divine status. People may be so excited with the exalted experience that they have not considered how their status as sons has been achieved.

Thus, in Romans 8 Paul carefully manages the situation. He does not prohibit the Abba prayer. Rather, he applies a particular (and for Paul, a new) theological interpretation of the event which will steer the assembly into thinking about the activity in useful (that is, Pauline) ways. As Geertz suggests, ritual experience can shape and then be used to reinforce religious concepts.

In Romans 8 and Galatians 4, Paul introduces a distinctly new idea – new for Paul, and unique in the New Testament. He places the ritual within a larger conceptual framework, stating that assembly members have been *adopted* as sons of God by God the Father and that the prayer is the result of the Spirit of God witnessing to God's initiative, rather than by anything the ritual actors have achieved through their own efforts.

> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. … You have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.
>
> *(Rom 8:14–17)*

> When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son … so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.
>
> *(Gal 4:4–7)*

These teachings work for Paul's intention. Adoption is the initiative and prerogative of the *father*, not the son. This fact fits well with Paul's theme of divine grace or the initiative of God, articulated earlier (e.g., Romans 3:24; 4:16). By emphasizing that God has adopted the faithful, Paul stresses the divine initiative and hopes to preclude claims of self-divinization.

In the Roman world, adoption had two benefits: status and inheritance (see discussion on adoption later in this section). In the above, Paul downplays the status aspect and emphasizes the inheritance aspect in the following way – "your status is only partially achieved now, it will be fully achieved in the future (the eschaton). Now you are but children, then you will be sons. Sonship will be your inheritance under the terms of adoption by God." See Rom 8:18–30 and Gal 4:1–6. In other words, some members of the Roman and Galatian assemblies may have been quite entranced by the present sensations of power and claims to status. Paul carefully pushes the finale of the process out of the present and into the future, at the eschaton.

To review: I am proposing that Paul's adoption theology arose in response to a pre-existent and ritualized activity, and represents Paul's attempt to interpret and thus manage the situation. By allowing for the possibility that Paul was led (one might say forced) into this teaching by the vividness and popularity of the ritual, we can catch a glimpse of an intriguing ritual in early Christianity. How well does this thesis fit with the data, the texts of Romans and Galatians? Very well. Let us consider various points in detail.

The first point to consider is the use of the Aramaic term "Abba." The use of Aramaic is rare in the New Testament, which is written in Greek. Paul uses very little Aramaic in his letters. One issue at stake is that Aramaic likely was the language

of the historical Jesus. Some scholars suggest that the use of Aramaic terms in the New Testament reflects devotional aspirations close to the world or times of Jesus, or are the remnants of an early phase of the Jesus movement which spoke Aramaic. Perhaps early liturgies or prayers had Aramaic components arising from such a devotional intent (i.e., to re-create the time and presence of Jesus through words) or such a cultural–linguistic intent ("we" are the group closest to the life and times of Jesus). These issues, however, do not exhaust the possibilities for the use of the term.

Before I can develop the other possibilities for the term Abba, I need to address a longstanding misunderstanding. It is a widely held modern view, somewhat like an urban myth, that the term "Abba" is a tender, childlike expression in Aramaic for "Father." With this interpretation, use of the term in reference to God reflects a lovely, intimate, and childlike relationship to God. We can perhaps blame the notable scholar Joachim Jeremais for this view, although finding where in Jeremais' works this view is presented is no simple task. Regardless, that assertion was dealt a deathblow in the essay by James Barr (1988). Yet, the view lingers on in many a sentimental Fathers' Day sermon and popular piety. Barr demonstrated conclusively that "Abba" is simply the standard way to refer to "Father" in first-century Aramaic – it did not have a particularly sentimental or informal aspect to it at that time.

In Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6, Paul refers to those who cry "Abba, Father." In the Greek text, the Aramaic term Abba is transliterated and joined with a formal address in Greek, "the father" – thus "*abba ho patēr.*" The fact that the Greek phrase "the father" is added suggests two things. Those who are crying out are not native Aramaic speakers. For such speakers, the Greek phrase would be redundant. Thus, the Greek phrase serves as an explanation or gloss of what the Aramaic word means. Clearly, we are at the interpretative, cognitive phase of the ritual at this point.

If the assembly members crying "Abba" are not native Aramaic speakers, why would they be using the phrase? Let us look to magic chants for a clue. In that sphere, use of foreign and even nonsense words is typical. The strangeness and unfamiliarity of the term adds to perceptions of its power and efficacy. The logic of unfamiliar words is that their strangeness suggests another reality, and that those who use those words are bridging the gap between familiar and unknown realms. On this, see the nuanced discussion of sacred language, intelligibility of chants, and archaic terms in Tambiah 1985, 20–27. Thus, while much scholarship to date has seen the location of the Abba cry within Aramaic Jesus-movement communities (and thus representing a rather "safe" and conservative branch of the movement), I estimate that the cry makes more sense in experimental Greco–Roman assemblies.

Other scholars assert that the use of "Abba, Father" here and in Galatians reflects a devotional link to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, as recorded in Mark 14:36. This is unlikely. Paul's texts date from the mid-50s to the early 60s CE. The Gospel of Mark probably appears in the late 60s and thus was not available to Paul. Could there be a common oral tradition of that prayer which was available to the writer of Mark and to Paul? Perhaps. The best we can suppose is that there may have been a tradition that Jesus prayed intensely and/or used the term "Abba" to refer to God. As noted above, the phrase "Abba, Father" is semantically redundant and therefore

makes no sense within an Aramaic community. The way the phrase may function within the Gospel of Mark is a separate issue, one which I will not develop further, except to note that scholars who assert that the Abba cry is linked to Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane are "domesticating" the ritual act – interpreting it as a rather safe devotional prayer rather than a more bold and inchoate phenomenon of experiencing power or asserting status.

Next, we turn to a rather unusual issue – how the Abba word is said aloud. Paul's phrase is rendered in English as "cry." This word is seen in Romans 8:15 and also Galatians 4:6. The Greek word is *krazō*, and it has onomatopoetic connotations of the croak of a crow (Grundmann 1965, 898). Some commentators find this aspect disconcerting and de-emphasize it. They portray a dignified public declaration. We would do better to retain the bold and strident sense of the term. Such sort of cries are typical of the realm of magic, where the tone and volume indicating strangeness or non-normalcy is prized. What we see is more likely a shout or shriek of power. It is noteworthy that the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, a standard and influential resource, emphasizes the odd and magical aspects of the term, and yet most scholars either ignore that aspect or dismiss it. Grundmann cites sensational texts describing magicians uttering this sort of cry (1965, 898–99). The Roman satirist Juvenal talks of the "roaring … loud" cry of a sorcerer (*Satires* 13.110–14 [Braund, Loeb Classical Library]), and Lucian describes a scene where the magician "no longer muttered in a low tone but shouted as loudly as he could, invoking the spirits, one and all, at the top of his lungs" (*Menippus* 9 [Harmon, LCL]). The Patristic heresiologist Hippolytus (*Refutation* 28) says that the sorcerer "utters a loud and harsh cry." The Roman poet Marcus Annaeus Lucanus has an extended description which suggests a scene from the witches of *Macbeth*:

> Next, her voice, more potent than all these potions, more apt to bewitch the Gods of Lethē, pours out murmurs, a babble of sounds, a gabble unlike any human tongue; her voice simulates barking of dogs, howls of wolves, quavering horned owl's cry and screech owl's nighttime hoot, squeals and roars of wild animals, also the asp's hiss. Then she mimics the thud of breakers dashing on reefs, forests' thrashing, peals of thunder rupturing cloudrack, one voice was all of Nature.
>
> *(Pharsalia 685–93 [Joyce 1994, 162–63])*

Grundmann also notes that in the New Testament this word typically is used in reference to the shrieks of demons (e.g., Mark 5:5; 9:26; Luke 9:39; Mark 1:23; Mark 3:11) and of humans in anguish (Matt 9:27; 15:22, 23; Mark 9:23–24; Matt 14:26) (1965: 900–901). Many commentators admit that there would have been a highly emotional aspect of this cry, but they do not develop the implications. Further, the verb in Rom 8:15 is the first person plural present active *krazomen*, "we cry" – indicating current group activity. In the earlier Galatians 4:6 it is *krazon*, third person singular present active participle, "he [the spirit] is crying."

It is also worth examining the word Paul uses for the inarticulate sounds which accompany the Jesus prayer and which may have been at the origin of the ritual. The word is *stenazō*, which means "to sigh, murmur, groan or pray inaudibly" (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996, 1638). Paul uses this word twice in reference to the group prayers ("we pray"; Rom 8:22, 26). What is particularly noteworthy is that Paul rhetorically compares group prayer to the "groanings" of the cosmos as all things await the final days (8:22). This is a very clever move – it relativizes the group activity by placing it within a much larger, God-oriented context and thus reduces the importance of those humans doing the groaning. On the issue of the cosmic scope of the situation, see Burke 2008, 279–81.

We now consider the "adoption" term *huiothesia* ("son-making"), which is unique in the New Testament and appears only in Pauline material. In addition to its occurrence in Romans 8:15, 23, 9:4, and Galatians 4:5, it also is used in Ephesians 1:5. Many explanations, perhaps theologically driven, argue laboriously in favor of some Hebrew scripture/Judean background behind Paul's thought (e.g., Scott 1992). While this background may have some currency for Paul, it has very little for his audience. The issue of adoption was rare in Judean culture, and simply not spoken of extensively in the Hebrew Scriptures. By contrast, it was common in Roman culture and Roman law (Scott 1992, 100–105; Lyall 1984, 80–88). This point is of great significance, and the arguments of this chapter (as within the book overall) position the early Christian movements within their Greco–Roman context, and take seriously the role of that context in shaping early Christian practice. By working so hard to find a "safe" Judean parallel rather than a Greco–Roman one, earlier scholars were steering the idea in tendentious and inaccurate ways. See Peppard 2011, who argues this point at length.

Earlier in this section, I noted the advantage of the concept of adoption for Paul is that adoption is the father's initiative, not that of the son. There were two aspects in Roman law: the present status of the adoptee (Scott 1992, 9; Lindsay 2009, 98, 103, 130, 171) and the future inheritance expected by the adoptee (Lindsay 2009, 65, 79, 97; Scott 1992, 244–58; Lyall 1984, 84–88, 101–117; Burke 2008, 267). Paul's argument qualifies the present status aspect and emphasizes the future inheritance aspect. This enables Paul to have his theological cake and eat it too. Paul affirms the present ritual experience and uses it (in fact manages it) by teaching in a particular way – a way that steers assembly members away from any possibility of self-aggrandizement and towards Paul's divine grace theology. I will expand on these two points.

First, how does Paul qualify or downplay the present status aspect? Through a careful, subtle, yet deliberate choice of words. In Romans 8:14–21 we observe a shift in language from "sons" (*huios*, probably representing the current claim of ritual participants) to "children" (*tekna*, what Paul asserts the assembly members are now) and then back to "sons" (*huios*, a status which Paul says only happens at the end-times, i.e., resurrection). Scholars who estimate that Paul uses the terms interchangeably have misunderstood the subtlety of Paul's argument. Paul uses the terms side-by-side but *not* interchangeably. Rather, he is pointedly asserting a substantial difference. The child is immature – the son is mature. The child does not receive the inheritance – the son can receive the inheritance.

Those scholars who claim that Paul uses the term "children" so as to be inclusive of gender (i.e., to include women in the reference, since "sons" is a gender-specific term) are working from a sincere but misguided modern desire to be inclusive. To understand Paul's use of language, we need to understand the mind of a first-century Mediterranean male. Children are subordinate, need to be disciplined, and are under the authority of fathers and teachers. Paul uses "children" terms when he wants to control or discipline the group, even when he seems to be speaking "tenderly" to them (e.g., Gal 4:19–20). In Galatians 4:1, 5, Paul uses the Greek term *nērioi*, "infants," to emphasize his claim that those who are adopted are in the family of God; they are still immature and almost like slaves (*douloi*), still needing guardianship and not fully autonomous. According to Gal 4:7, it is not until the future that the status as a son (*huios*) will be confirmed as the person becomes an heir (*klēronomos*).

Linked to Paul's motif of "children" then "sons" is Paul's present–future scenario. In Romans 8:17–25, Paul asserts that at present, assembly members are only children. They have been adopted into God's family but have not yet received the inheritance. Only at the time of resurrection and the eschaton do they receive the inheritance, which is sonship. Until then, they are only children waiting for a gift. All of Paul's "hope" terms and his eschatological teaching in Romans 8 make sense if we allow for the possibility that those in the assembly were claiming sonship status *now*. They do not want to wait for the gift – they claim it now! Paul's scenario is a bit obscure here, an example of what might be called a partially realized eschatology. "We have something now, but we will only have it in fullness then." The debate in the Roman assembly likely might have been, "well, what exactly do we have *now*?" The children and gift analogy is apt – would anyone be satisfied with a sort-of or partial gift? Some likely focused on present status rather than future inheritance. Who would want pie in the sky when you could have some pie now? The fact that Paul argues in favor of inheritance does not settle the issue – or at least it might not have for the recipients of Paul's letters. In other words, Paul chooses to emphasize the inheritance issue because it suits his purpose. But a status issue interpretation is equally valid, given the adoption metaphor. This demonstrates that Paul's argument is not as ironclad as some have assumed it to be. And that suggests that it is an *ad hoc* response by Paul to a pre-existing problem, rather than a carefully devised and systematic theological point.

In fact, a problem with Paul's adoption metaphor is that it eventually breaks down. In inheritance, the gift is achieved when the father dies. But God the Father does not die. In Paul's argument, it is when the *children* die that they achieve the inheritance. The rather convoluted logic here suggests that Paul is grasping at straws or making something up on the fly in response to a pre-existing issue.

Another weak point in Paul's argument lies in the mechanics of adoption in the Roman world (Scott 1992, 9–16; Burke 2008, 263; Longenecker 2014, 71–72; Lindsay 2009; Lyall 1984, 81ff.). In that context, individual males were adopted as sons; there was not group or corporate adoption (Scott 1992, 10–11; Burke 2008, 265–66; Lyall 1984, 84ff.). There may be some connection in Paul's mind to the

adoption of the nation of Israel as "sons of God" – but that may not have been apparent to his Greco–Roman audience. Perhaps Paul is emphasizing the group aspect of corporate adoption ("we" cry, for example, and "we" are adopted) to diffuse individual power/status claims which could arise from ritual experimentation. Again, we look to the realm of magic as an analogue. Magicians usually operated as solo artists, and made individual claims of status as favored agents of the spirits they worked with. Paul rarely uses the term "sons of God." This suggests that its use here arises from a pre-existent condition and that Paul uses it in Romans and Galatians from the necessity of local conditions.

Finally, we consider Paul's rather fluid or vague "spirit" language in Romans 8. He refers to a spirit of sonship, a spirit of slavery, a spirit, and a spirit of God. How do these terms connect? Is there a connection? This imprecise or complex language suggests an experimental ritual whose explanation has not yet been fully developed. Paul throws a lot of terms into the rhetorical mix in an attempt to do damage control against those who may have made self-aggrandizing claims. Spirit is presented as a controlling agent which prompts or guides action. Paul says that it is not the participants who are acting (on their own initiative); rather, it is the Spirit of God which prompts them. The Abba cry is not an individual's claim of status; rather, it is a Spirit-prompted initiative which affirms a present, partial reality and points to a future, fulfilled reality under God's control. At times, the speakers either are not saying anything distinguishable or else do not know or understand what they are saying. Now that is a subtle and complex argument by Paul! Yes, "we" are praying, but we don't really know what we are praying for, and it is not in fact we who are praying but the Spirit in/through us. If that does not undercut individual agency, then I do not know what does!

So, what has been achieved so far? We see that the hypothesis of a ritual of accessing power fits well with the details of the texts of Romans and Galatians. In fact, not only does it fit, it explains some matters in a simpler and more direct manner than has been seen in other explanations. It reveals subtleties in Paul's argumentation that have been overlooked and sheds light on rather murky areas of Paul's rhetoric. At this point the hypothesis is an intriguing possibility. Now, I briefly note a few background issues which lend credibility to the hypothesis.

Background to the issue

Evidence from Jewish and Jesus–assembly texts shows that the breath or spirit of God had connotations of his creative actions. The classic text is Genesis 2:7, in which God is described breathing the breath of life into man, and man became a living being. This motif is repeated in Psalm 104:30, in the *Wisdom of Solomon* 15:11, and dramatically serves as the key element in the prophetic vision in Ezekiel 37:5–10 of the dry bones being reanimated (Hiebert 2008). The Gospel of John 20:22–23 recounts that Jesus breathed or blew on his disciples as he transformed their status into apostolic judges (Derrett 1998). *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:25 says about wisdom (here, a spirit-like entity) "she is a breath of the power of God." The

prevalence of this motif makes it credible that those wishing to experience God or acquire wisdom or facilitate self-transformation might consider that deep breathing was a suitable ritual action to achieve this end.

Next, we find that the motif of acquiring the Spirit of God (often compared to breath or wind) is attested in the Hebrew Scriptures. In particular, the Judges of Israel are portrayed as receiving the Spirit as they assume office and exercise authority and power: Othniel (Judg 3:10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and most notably Samson (13:25, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14). The first kings of Israel also received the spirit of God and went into frenzy or altered states of consciousness. See the accounts of Saul (1 Sam 10:5–13; 19:18–24) and David (1 Sam 16:13). The stories of Samson, Saul, and David are exciting, and we can imagine that they might grip the imagination of ritual experimenters who themselves sought to acquire God's spirit. The Gospel of John, a spirit-focused text, asserts that believers must be "born of the Spirit" (3:5, 6, 8) and should "worship in the Spirit" (4:23–24). Perhaps the Jesus assemblies in Rome and Galatia were trying to "worship in the Spirit." As noted above, the Acts of the Apostles (2:17–18) cites the Hebrew scriptures book of Joel (2:28–29), which speaks of the spirit of God coming to a special remnant of God's faithful people in the last days.

Turning to another issue, we know that the theme of human divinization or becoming god-like was a feature of the Greco–Roman world. See Lanziollotta 2013 for a full discussion. Plato often refers to the process of achieving likeness to god (*homoiosis theo*), presenting it as an aim of Socrates: "to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise" (*Theaetetus* 176A-B [Fowler, LCL]). From Plato, the concept passes through various forms, into Middle Platonism of the first century and then Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism of the second and following centuries. In some texts of the Jesus movement, becoming god-like is held to be a possibility. Notable in the following examples is that this process of deification is presented as happening *now*, in this life, rather than only in the next life. Note the present tense of the verbs as Paul speaks of transformation happening in the present life of believers: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come," (2 Cor 5:17) and "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18). Similarly, the assertion in 2 Peter 1:4, "[you] may become participants [*koinōnoi*, "sharers"] of the divine nature," is framed within a discussion of earthly life and piety (1:3, *eusebeian*, godliness) and virtues of this life (1:5–7).

A variety of texts and issues in the Greco–Roman period demonstrate that claims to divine sonship were part of the milieu. Paul's communities may have been part of a larger trend. For example, we note the growing tendency in the Roman Empire for emperors to take the title "son of god." The use of the term starts with Julius Caesar, is enthusiastically continued by Octavian/Augustus, becomes standard within the Julian–Claudian dynasty (Nero in particular) and continues with Vespasian and the Flavians (Peppard 2011, 46–49). An interesting issue is the claim of Alexander the Great to divine sonship. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, a

series of accounts emerged which spoke of Alexander's claim of *adoption* by the god Ammon/Zeus, rather than earlier accounts of divine "biological" parentage (Scott 1992, 16–19, 56).

The epistle 1 John provides interesting points of comparison to Paul's teachings about Spirit and adoption. In 1 John, we see a similar use of child terms ("little children," *teknia*, 2:1, 12, 28; 3:18; 4:4; 5:21; and "children," *tekna*, 3:1–2). As with the case of Paul, it is important for us not to sentimentalize these terms; we should recognize that the author uses them strategically to stake his claim as an authority figure over the group (like a father). The Johannine author may have inherited the child terminology from practices in the group relating to statements of group identity when he says, "we are called children of God" (*tekna theou*, 3:1–2). As is the case with Paul's groups in Galatia and Rome, it is possible that the group also has gone further and claimed actual sonship, and thus the author may deliberately avoid using the term "son." Children yes, sons no. Further, the author handles the situation in a way similar to Paul's teaching in Romans and Galatians on partially realized eschatology ("we are God's children now, what we will be has not yet been revealed," 3:2).

To see explicit evidence of the use of slogans such as "we are sons of God" or "we are children of God," we turn to the next case, the text known as *Wisdom of Solomon*. It is a mid–second-century BCE Hellenistic Jewish book and part of the Septuagint (Greek edition of the Hebrew Scriptures). The author writes within the wisdom tradition of the ancient near east, valorizing those who seek wisdom and castigating the foolish and unenlightened. On several occasions, the author proudly characterizes those in the wisdom camp as "sons of God" (*huios theou*, 2:16, 18; 5:5; 12:19, 21) or his "children" (*paidōn*, 2:10; 12:21). Of particular relevance to my thesis is the polemic nature of the title as recorded in one passage. The author gives voice to his opponents, the godless and unjust men. He says that they say (concerning the just man), he "*boasts* that God is his father" (2:16; italics added). The Greek term for boast is *alazoneuetai* (make false pretensions, brag) and comes from *alazoneia* (false pretension, imposture; LSJ 59–60). What is fascinating is that this claim is classified as "boasting," and it produces a harsh social reaction from outsiders, namely persecution and oppression. This reaction demonstrates the social jockeying associated with the claim.

Conclusion to the case study

This case study has produced a new way of understanding Paul's adoption theology: as a response to a powerful ritual. Paul interprets the ritual in such a way as to steer it away from what he views as a problematic self-aggrandizement and towards a humble acceptance of God's grace. I have used ritual theory, in particular the insight of Geertz. Geertz alerts us to the fact that ritual experience can precede religious concept and also reinforce or teach it. I have also used insights from psychology and physiology about the pre-cognitive nature of experience, and ways that ritual and meditation can facilitate altered states of consciousness. These theories from ritual

studies have given us new questions to pose to New Testament data. Finally, I have de-privileged Paul in order to give scope for a developed understanding of the ritual which he mentions, a ritual which I suggest is the catalyst for his teaching.

The utility of any thesis is how well it (1) thoroughly explains data, (2) answers tricky or obscure features of data, and (3) plausibly links previously unconnected data into a new and coherent pattern. My thesis does all three, and thus demonstrates the value of applying a ritual studies perspective to the New Testament texts – texts which, despite 2,000 years of analysis, still have new information to yield and possibilities to suggest.

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3

ACCESSING DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

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Introduction

The early Christian apologist Lactantius (240–330 CE) identifies a failed ritual of divination as the spark that set off the Great Persecution of the early church that ended with Constantine's Edict of Toleration in 313 CE. While in Antioch in 299 CE, Emperor Diocletian, whose courtiers included both pagans and Christians, arranged for the slaughter of some cattle so "that from their livers he might obtain a prognostic of events" (*De Mortibus Persecutorum* X; *Anti-Nicene Fathers* 7:304). During the sacrificial rites, his Christian courtiers surreptitiously made the sign of the cross. Lactantius says that this action chased away "the daemons" so that no tokens for divination were found on the livers no matter how often the rites were repeated. Eventually the chief haruspex realized "there are profane persons here, who obstruct the rites" (ibid.).[1]

Diocletian's initial response was to order his courtiers to sacrifice to the Roman gods or be whipped. Soldiers were ordered to do likewise or be discharged. Goaded by Galerius, his co-ruler and son-in-law, to rid the empire of "these enemies of the gods and adversaries of the established religious ceremonies," Diocletian sent an embassy to inquire of Apollo at Didymus. On the basis of this oracle, February 23, 303, the festival of Terminus, god of boundaries, was selected as an auspicious day to "terminate, as it were, the Christian religion" (Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum* XI–XII, *ANF* 7:305). Churches were razed, scriptures burned, treasures seized, clergy arrested. Christians were forbidden to assemble for worship and deprived of rank, property, and the due process of law unless they sacrificed to the gods of Rome.

This incident demonstrates graphically how very important access to knowledge from the gods was in the Roman world. To help us understand the phenomenon of divination, we will draw upon the field of ritual studies, especially Catherine Bell's

Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (1992) and *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (1997). Her focus on the process of ritualization and its role in power relationships, together with her genres of ritual activity, serves as an etic model—i.e., a cognitive map— for observing, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing, and analyzing Greco–Roman, Judean, Jesus group, and early church rituals for accessing divine knowledge.

Catherine Bell on ritualization

Bell defines ritualization as a human practice that is situational, strategic, embedded in "misrecognition," and reproducing "redemptive hegemony." Ritual practices are situational, that is, they are rooted in real cultural and historical circumstances, and cannot be grasped apart from their specific contexts. Ritual practices are inherently strategic, manipulative, and expedient, involving situational schemes, tactics, and strategies that construct meanings and values, posit relationships of authority and submission, and reproduce patterns from the past even as they reinterpret and trans-form them. Misrecognition refers to the way leaders and participants see themselves as responding naturally and appropriately to a given set of circumstances, but often do not see how their activity creates and generates, reorders and reinterprets the situation they seek to address. Redemptive hegemony denotes the way participa-tion in ritual practices produces a vision for personal action and empowerment (1992, 81–84; 1997, 81–83).

Bell sees ritualization primarily as a strategy for the construction of power rela-tionships. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, she defines power as a mode of action aimed at directing the activity and conduct of others without coercion or violence. Power relationships cannot exist in the absence of freedom, the option of acting differently, the possibility of resistance, escape, or flight. She writes, "A power relationship undoes itself when it succeeds in reducing the other to total subservi-ence or transforming the other into an overt adversary" (1992, 201). Ritualization constructs power relationships by differentiating and privileging particular activities, delineating special places and times, and identifying specialized personnel, objects, texts, dress, gestures, and speech for a particular constituency (1992, 197–205). One way to get at this power dimension when analyzing any particular ritual action is to ask this question: in this ritual, what/who affects what/whom, by what means, in what circumstances, for what purpose, and according to whom? (adapted from Quack and Tobelmann 2010, 17–18).

In the ritual described as this chapter opens, Diocletian, the most powerful human in the Roman Empire seeks information about forthcoming events, information that is known only to the gods. Having this knowledge will make him more powerful, enabling him to act in accordance with the will of the gods. He arranges for a ritual of divination that involves examining the liver of a ritually slain animal for marks that may be read as omens. The ritual repeatedly fails to provide the expected results.

Rituals can fail for a variety of reasons, such as inadvertent mistakes in their per-formance, hence the repetition of Diocletian's ritual, but to no avail. Rituals also fail because of the presence of inappropriate persons or conditions, violations of purity

laws or taboos deemed essential to the ritual, and/or disruptive actions intended to "defeat" the rite (Grimes 1988, 110–16; Hauser-Schaublin 2007, 245–46). "Failure implies a disrupted relationship between humans and gods/ancestors that can be restored, if at all, only with great difficulty and sometimes after much loss" (Hauser-Schaublin 2007, 245). In many cultures, ritual failure is greatly feared as a catalyst for natural catastrophes, illness, and death. Christian refusals to offer sacrifices to the gods and the images of the emperor were often cited as the cause of natural disasters in the ancient world (Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.9).

Diocletian's ritual specialists concluded that their rituals of divination failed due to the presence and actions of "profane"—impure, unclean, inappropriate—persons. The Christian Lactantius claims the "daemons" fled when the emperor's Christian courtiers made the sign of the cross. The situation appears to be one of competition and rivalry between traditional Roman religious practices and emerging Christianity. Diocletian was unable to overlook this ritual failure, and sought to purge the imperial service, the military, and eventually the empire itself of these profane persons. At this point we might wonder, what kind of rituals were these? What was their purpose?

Bell proposes six genres or categories of ritual action as a means of classifying and analyzing the plethora of rituals observed in human societies. Her genres are not intended to be definitive or exhaustive, as she states, "there are many other recognizable rituals that could be usefully classified in other categories, and there are rituals that could logically be placed in more than one category" (1997, 94). She names six genres as examples of rituals that are primarily communal, traditional (i.e., based on ways of acting established in the past), and rooted in beliefs in divine beings. These include rites of passage; calendrical rites; rites of exchange and communion; rites of affliction; feasting, fasting, and festivals; and political rites (1997, 91–137).

Ancient rituals seeking access to knowledge from the god(s) can be classified in more than one category, and often represent overlapping, complementary, and even competing social and ritual systems. For example, rites of exchange and communion involve making offerings to the god(s) in expectation of receiving something in return such as fertility, long life, safe passage, or some abstract benefit (Bell 1997, 108). Diocletian makes sacrificial offerings to the god(s) with the expectation of receiving a sign of approval for his upcoming plans. But when the emperor orders his courtiers and soldiers to sacrifice to the Roman gods, he transforms a rite of exchange and communion into a political rite. Bell defines political rites as ceremonial practices that construct, display, and/or promote the power and interests of a particular political institution, constituency, or sub-group (1997, 128–29). The imperial order to sacrifice to the gods of Rome was a demand for a public demonstration of loyalty and submission to the empire and its rulers. Some Christians undoubtedly did so to avoid whipping or losing their jobs. Others, like Lactantius, chose to resign their posts.[2]

The seriousness of ritual success or failure in any given situation is linked to "ritual density," how much ritual activity is present in a particular society or historical period. Bell, building on the work of Mary Douglas, correlates ritual density with

social structure and ritual style. Societies like those of the ancient Mediterranean region that emphasize group identity and hierarchical social structures tend to have more ritual activity, predominantly of the "appease and appeal" and/or "cosmological ordering" styles (1997, 185). Rituals seeking access to knowledge from the god(s) are concerned about cosmologically ordering human activity, ensuring that human decisions and actions are aligned with the will of the god(s), and hence have a divine mandate (Bell 1997, 103). The failure of Diocletian's ritual, therefore, had deep religious, political, and social implications.

Accessing divine knowledge in the Greco–Roman world

Divination is the name given to ritual practices intended to access knowledge from the god(s). It is premised on the belief that divine action produces signs in the physical universe that can be interpreted by humans to their benefit. Greco–Roman authors regarded divination as a transcultural phenomenon handed down from time immemorial. Cicero writes,

> I am aware of no people, however refined and learned or however savage and ignorant, which does not think that signs are given of future events, and that certain persons can recognize those signs and foretell events before they occur.
> *(De divinatione 1.1 [Falconer, Loeb Classical Library])*

He links various forms of divination with different peoples. The Chaldeans read the stars, the peoples of Asia Minor observe the songs and flights of birds, the Greeks turn to their oracle, while Rome's founders handed on the gift of augury (*De divinatione* 1.2–3).

Cicero's comments do not exhaust the wide variety of methods ancients employed to access knowledge from the gods. Presuming that any element of the physical world could become a conduit for communication from the gods, the ancients paid special attention to extraordinary activity in the environment such as comets, stars, eclipses, thunder, lightning, earthquakes, and so forth. They carefully observed the behavior of animals, examined the external appearance and internal organs of sacrificial animals. They believed the gods could manipulate inanimate objects such as beans or stones when used in rituals of casting lots. The ancients learned that changes in consciousness made humans open to heavenly contact through dreams, visions, auditions, and prophecy. Often various modes of divination were combined in order to confirm and substantiate a sign and its interpretation (Kitz 2003, 24–33). Diocletian's ritual specialists sought information from the god Apollo through oracles in order to understand the absence of marks on the livers of the sacrificed cattle.

A brief description of a visit to the oracle of Delphi shows us how different types of rituals and methods of divination often worked together. The oracle at Delphi was the most prestigious religious site in the Greek world, dedicated to accessing knowledge from the god Apollo. A variety of ritual specialists staffed the shrine. The

Pythia was chosen from a guild of priestesses native to Delphi specifically to seek answers to supplicants' questions while in an alternate state of consciousness (ASC). Her responses were transmitted and recorded by a *prophetes*. One or two leading citizens of Delphi were chosen at a time to serve as lifelong priests, overseeing the activities of the shrine, offering sacrifices, and conducting some rites of divination.[3]

Prior to the divinatory session with the *Pythia*, supplicants purified themselves with holy water (a rite of purification), and made a sacrificial offering to the god Apollo (a rite of exchange and communion). This was usually a goat, which also served as a medium for divination. The animal was doused with holy water and watched to see if it trembled in the correct way, from the hooves up. This auspicious sign indicated the sacrifice and the consultation could proceed. Admission to the oracle's anteroom was determined by honor, status, and/or by casting lots (another method of divination). The supplicant's question was transmitted by a priest to the *Pythia*, who sought an answer from the god Apollo by entering an alternate state of consciousness while gazing into a dish of water. Her response was then transmitted back to the supplicant, and recorded (Plutarch, *De Pythiae oraculis*; Broad 2007, 36–39; Maurizio 1995, 83).

An appeal to the oracle involved a whole set of ritual activities, including rites of purification, rites of exchange, and multiple rites of divination. While the primary mode of divination at Delphi was the *Pythia*'s ASC experience, other non-ASC techniques were used as preliminaries to determine the timing and order in which petitions were presented.

Given that the supplicants at Delphi were most frequently members of ruling elites—i.e., private citizens of means, lawmakers, or delegations from city states or kings—Delphi functioned primarily as a site for the ritual construction, display, and promotion of their political interests as being cosmologically aligned. The oracle provided divine affirmation and legitimation of, or warned against, enacting laws, establishing colonies, going to war, and other matters of state. Roman elites behaved in similar ways, seeking divine knowledge to guide and validate their political affairs.

The desire to access divine knowledge was not limited to ruling elites. Private individuals consulted oracles to determine if and when to marry, undertake a voyage, or make a loan, while community leaders asked the god about projected crop yields, herd increases, and public health (Plutarch, *De Pythiae oraculis* 408C). Documents from third century CE Roman Egypt demonstrate that men and women, free people and slaves, businessmen and soldiers, the wealthy and those who could not pay their taxes sought advice on business and personal matters from oracles (*Sortes Astrampsychi* in De Villiers 1999, 47). It might be tempting to dismiss these as simply strange rituals practiced by superstitious pagan peoples that were completely alien to Judean and Christ-following groups. That would be a mistake.

Divination through alternate states of consciousness (ASC)

An extensive study undertaken by Ohio State University anthropologist Erika Bourguignon in the 1960s found that 80% of the forty-four Mediterranean

societies studied had one or more institutionalized forms of ASC (1979, 236; Pilch 1996, 133). These are neurophysiological events marked by greater predominance of brain activity in the right hemisphere and non-frontal parts of the brain in contrast to "ordinary waking" consciousness, which is dominated by left brain activity (Newberg, d'Aquili, and Rouse 2001; Newberg and Waldman 2006; Newburg and Waldman 2010). ASCs can be induced by a wide variety of activities, such as drumming or chanting; fasting; exposure to extreme cold or heat or other physical or emotional stressors; meditation; community rituals; specific ritual postures; and alcohol and hallucinogens. ASCs always occur within the context of specific belief systems that fill them with culturally significant and expected scenarios, and provide the key to understanding and interpreting them. Three types of ASCs are commonly identified in the ancient world:

1   Possession trances, in which a spirit being enters, speaks, or acts through a human.
2   Sky journeys, sometimes called soul flight, where a human is transported to the divine realm.
3   Meditative states that blur the boundaries between the human and divine realms.

(Winkelman 1997, 393–428; Goodman 1990, 71–75; DeMaris 2000, 11–15; Pilch 2004, 4–5; Williams 2006, 94–7; Craffert 2010, 126–46).

 ASC techniques for accessing knowledge from god(s) were truly trans-cultural, as Table 3.1 demonstrates. Spirit possession, meditative states, and dreams were the most frequently reported and sought after by all groups. Ancients viewed dreams as means through which the gods and spirits could and did communicate with humans (Dodson 2002, 40). Although everyone had access to the divine through dreaming, most dreams were enigmatic and required interpretation. Priests in the temples of Asclepius interpreted the dreams of their patients to discern the causes of their ailments. Ancient Israelite patriarchs were led by their dreams (Gen 28:10–17), and served as dream interpreters for their adversaries (Gen 41; Dan 2:24–45; 4:19–27). Dreams guided Joseph in providing protection for the unborn and infant Jesus (Matt 1:18–2:23). The Apostle Paul is led by a dream to Macedonia (Acts 16:6–10). Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica* (second century CE), the only surviving dream interpretation from the Greco–Roman world, cites numerous previous works on the subject. The Christian Bishop Synesius of Cyrene (died 413 CE) wrote a treatise *On Dreams* defending dreams as a path to the divine (Neil 2015, 23).

 The Greek Magical Papyri, dating from the second century BCE to the fifth century CE, provide details of rituals intended to access divine knowledge through ASCs. Ritual specialists, occasionally assisted by a child medium, enacted vessel or lamp divinations to summon gods and daemons to answer questions posed by the persons or households that sought their counsel. Vessel divination involved pouring water into a receptacle, covering it with oil, and reading the reflections that appeared in the water. Lamp divination consisted of gazing at the burning wick of a lamp and seeing the gods within it. These rituals were well planned in advance

TABLE 3.1 Types of alternate states of consciousness in Ancient Greco–Roman cultures

Cultural group	Possession trance	Sky journey	Meditative/dream states
Greco–Roman	Plutarch, *de Pythia Oraculis* 397C; *Obsolence of Oracles* 414E, 431B Cicero, *De divinatione* 1.79, 2.117 Lucan, *Pharsalia* 5.97–101, 148–57, 165–98 Aelius Aristides, *In Defense of Oratory* 43 Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* 3.11	"The Dream of Scipio" Cicero, *Republic* V.9–26. *The Mithras Liturgy* (*PGM* IV. 475–849) *Eighth Book of Moses* (*PGM* XIII 1–730)	Vessel divination (*PGM* IV 222–233) Lamp divination (*PGM* IV 1085–1104) Dream incubation (e.g., cult of Asklepios) Dream revelations (*PGM* V 397–399; 457–458; VII 748f; VII 1001; VIII 67) Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica*
Israelite/ Judean	1 Sam 10:10; 16:14; Ezek 2:2 Philo, *Who is the Heir to Divine Things*? 265–266; *Life of Moses* 1.274–277 Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.6.5	Ezek 3:12–14; 11:1 1 Enoch	Visions (Isa 6:1–13) Dreams (Gen 20:1–7; 28:10–17; 30:25–31:17; 37:5–9; 40:1–41:36; Dan 1–7) Angels (Gen 16:7–14; 22:11–15; Exod 3:2–4; Num 22:22–38) Pesher (e.g. 1 QpHab VII. 4–5) Adjuration of angels (e.g., Sar Torah, Sefer ha-Razim)
Jesus movement & early church	Filled with the Spirit (e.g., Mark 1:12; 3:21; Acts 4:8; 7:55–56; 13:9; Gospel of Thomas 13.5; Didache 11.7) Speaking in Tongues (1 Cor 14:18; Acts 2:1–13) Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.22.5 New Prophecy (Montanism)	2 Cor 12:2–4 Revelation	Angels (Luke 1:11–20; 26–28; Acts 8:26) Dreams (Matt 1:20; 2:7, 12, 19) Visions (Acts 9:1–12; 10:1–3, 9–11, 19; 16:9–10; 22:17–21); Gospel of Mary Gospel of Judas Synesius of Cyrene, *On Dreams*

to coincide with propitious phases of the moon or its position within certain signs of the zodiac. The diviner, the objects used, and the room in which the ritual was conducted had to be in a state of purity. The rituals included offerings, fumigations with incense, myrrh, and other substances, the application of special ointments to the eyes, and the repetition of long, complex incantations (Quack 2010).

   Texts from Qumran (e.g., 4Q560) and the hekhalot literature attests to similar "magical" ASC practices within late antique Judaism. Fasting, washing, and seclusion prepare the practitioner for the ritual recitation of the divine name for the

purpose of ascending to the heavens (sky journey) or conjuring an angelic presence or aid in response to human need (Swartz 2001; Swartz 1994; Lightstone 1986). Similar practices appear in the Christian New Prophecy (Montanist) movement of the second and third centuries CE, including fasting, the use of child mediums, trance, spirit possession, and the utterance of unintelligible sounds (Wypustek 1997).

Divinely inspired women known as *sibyls* prophesied at Delphi, Dodona, Didymus, and other holy sites around the Mediterranean. The last king of Rome (died 495 BCE) purchased a collection of their oracles. These books, called *Libri Sibyllini*, were entrusted to the safekeeping of a college of fifteen curators, usually ex-consuls or ex-praetors, assisted by two Greek interpreters. They were kept secret and consulted by Roman rulers from the fourth century BCE to the fourth century CE.

Israelite prophets received messages from God through visions, auditions, spirit possession, and dreams. Isaiah has a vision of God while worshiping in the Temple (Isa 6:1–13). The word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah (1:4; 2:1). The Israelite prophet Ezekiel describes how "a spirit entered into me" (2:2; 3:22), lifted him up, and transported him in visions to Jerusalem (8:3), and on another occasion set him down in a valley full of bones (37:1). Daniel's visions came to him as dreams in the night (Dan 7:1–10). The biblical prophets spoke to the ruling elites. Samuel reluctantly follows God's instructions to choose Israel's first king, and later anoints David. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, and possibly Habbakuk, were of priestly status, suggesting that ASC-produced oracles may have been a function of the central temple cult. Nathan was a household, or court, prophet mediating divine knowledge to King David. Amos, who was by trade a herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees, emerges as a prophet advocating social change and challenging the ruling elites.

The ancient Israelite prophetic texts came to take on a status not unlike the *Libri Sibyllini*, being regarded as oracles that spoke not only to the distant past, but which could with proper interpretation yield insight into current events. The Qumran community regarded its Teacher of Righteousness as a person to whom God had made known "all the mysteries of his servants the prophets" (1 QpHab VII.4–5). Their method of divinely revealed interpretation, known as *pesher*, correlated ancient prophecies with events occurring in the interpreter's lifetime.

Jesus appears in the gospel narratives as an Israelite holy man for whom ASC experiences are foundational. As he emerges from the waters of the Jordan, Jesus sees the Spirit of God descending into him and hears a voice declaring that he is God's beloved Son (Mark 1:9–11//Matt 3:13–17//Luke 3:21–22). The same Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where Satan tests him over a forty-day period (Mark 1:12–13//Matt 4:1–11//Luke 4:1–13). In the eyes of his peers, Jesus was a prophet (Mark 6:15//Matt 14:5//Luke 9:8; also John 4:19; 6:14; 7:37–40; 9:17), a view that coincided with Jesus' own understanding of himself (Mark 6:5//Matt 13:57//Luke 4:24; 13:33; John 4:44).

The Johannine Jesus communicates in oracles of self-commendation, speaking for, or as, the bread of life (6:35, 48, 51); the light of the world (8:12; 9:5); the gate for the sheep (10:7, 9); the way, truth, and life (14:6–7); and the true vine (15:1).

Jesus' prophetic cry, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me" (7:37) identifies him as one who speaks for, or as, divine Wisdom (Ringe 1999, 61; Cory 1997, 95–116). Jesus' declarations, "I am from above" (8:23) and "I came from the Father" (16:28), fit the same pattern of self-commendation oracles typically associated with spirit possessed prophets and sibyls (Aune 1983, 40, 70–71). It has been suggested that the giving of the Spirit was a primary purpose of Jesus' ministry in the Fourth Gospel (von Wahlde 1990, 117; Neyrey 1988, 182–215; Malina 1994, 173), and that the Johannine Jesus' discourses were intended to facilitate entry into trance (Davies 1995, 200; Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003).

Jesus recruited disciples whom he sent out to teach, preach, and cast out demons (Mark 3:13–15//Matt 10:1–4//Luke 6:12–16). Jesus' identity as God's beloved Son was revealed through ASC experiences, such as the transfiguration (Mark 9:2–10// Matt 17:1–9//Luke 9:28–36). A vision of angels at the site of his tomb informs Jesus' women followers that he had been raised from the dead (Mark 16:1–8// Matt 18:1–8//Luke 24:1–12//Jn 20:1–10). The disciples' encounters with the risen Christ all occurred in ASCs (Pilch 1998, 52–60).

In Acts, every significant step in spreading the good news of Jesus is the result of some form of ASC. Unbelievers hear the gospel preached by persons "filled with the Holy Spirit" (4:8; 7:55–56; 13:9–11). An Ethiopian eunuch is baptized when an angel directs Philip to intercept him on the wilderness road from Jerusalem to Gaza (8:26–40). Saul has been blind and fasting for three days, when during his prayer he sees a vision of Ananias coming to lay hands on him (9:9–12). Ananias is directed to tend Saul in a dream vision (9:10–19). Prayer (a meditative state) and almsgiving prepare the centurion Cornelius for a vision (10:1–3). Peter is fasting and praying when he falls into a trance and sees the heavens opened to reveal a sheet filled with all kinds of animals descending from the sky (10:9–11). While Peter is still focused on puzzling out the meaning of this vision, the Spirit speaks to him again (10:19). Worship, fasting, and prayer set the stage for the Spirit's instruction to set apart Barnabas and Saul (13:2–3). Prayer in the Temple provides the context for Paul's vision of Jesus telling him to leave Jerusalem (22:17–18).

The importance of ASC-derived knowledge from God is further highlighted in Paul's letters. Paul claims he was set apart and called by a revelation of Jesus Christ to proclaim the gospel among the Gentiles (Gal 1:12, 15–16). A revelation prompted him to visit Jerusalem fourteen years later to lay out before the acknowledged leaders the gospel he was proclaiming (Gal 2:2). When defending his status as an apostle to the Corinthians, Paul refers to a sky journey in which he was "caught up to the third heaven … in Paradise and heard things that are not to be told" (2 Cor 12:2–4). Paul shares the oracle he received in response to his prayer that the thorn in his flesh would leave him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12: 8–9). Paul introduces innovative teaching as oracular pronouncements with phrases such as "through the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess 4:2–6), "by the word of the Lord" (1 Thess 4:15–17), or as "mystery" (1 Cor 15:51–52; Rom 11:25–26).

ASC experiences were a source of honor and status as well as a cause of conflict in Paul's congregations. At the end of a discussion of marriage in 1 Cor 7:40, he quips, "and I think that I too have the Spirit of God," a remark suggesting his opponents claimed the same status. Paul's evaluation of speaking in tongues in relation to prophecy indicates rivalry between members adept at different forms of ASCs. Paul notes that he speaks in tongues more than any of them (1 Cor 14:18), but places a higher value on prophecy because it builds up, encourages, and consoles the entire community and not just the one speaking (1 Cor 14:3–4). He insists that any spiritually empowered person will recognize his instructions as "a command of the Lord" (1 Cor 14:37). Further evidence of rivalry over access to divine knowledge can be found in 1 John (prophetic conflict over access to divine knowledge), the Gospel of Thomas (especially Logion 13), Didache (prophets speaking in the spirit, 11.7), the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Judas (visionary encounters with the resurrected or never-crucified Christ).

Like their Greco–Roman and Judean neighbors, early Christ-followers consulted ancient prophetic texts to create their own ritualized worldview and way of life. The gospel writers presented many aspects of Jesus' life as fulfillments of ancient prophecies, such as his virginal conception (Matt 1:22–23//Isa 7:14), his birth at Bethlehem (Matt 2:5–6; Mic 5:2; 2 Sam 5:2), his family's sojourn in Egypt (Matt 2:15; Hos 11:1), Herod's massacre of the innocents (Matt 2:17–18; Jer 31:15), John the Baptist's ministry (Matt 3:3//Mark 1:2–3//Luke 3:4–6; Isa 40:3), the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee (Matt 4:14–16; Isa 9:1–2), Jesus' cleansing of the Temple (John 2:17; Ps 69:9), his humble entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Matt 21:1–5//John 12:12–15; Isa 62:11; Zech 9:9), and the piercing of his side during his crucifixion (John 19:36–37; Ps 34:20; Exod 12:46; Num 9:12; Zech 12:10).

Such divine validation of Jesus' life and ministry was necessary because, as Paul states, "we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Judeans, and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23). The problem was not just that no one in the ancient world was expecting a crucified messiah, but that a person who was crucified was "cursed," a source of defilement for the land (Gal 3:13; Deut 21:23). We shall return to this subject later in the section the "sign of the cross."

This brief survey shows us that Roman rulers likes Diocletian relied on oracles and turned to ancient collections of prophetic texts, as well as other techniques of divination, to guide their decision-making processes. Through these means ruling elites sought assurances that their policies and plans were cosmologically aligned with the will of the god(s). Private persons sought the services of ritual specialists who could interpret their dreams, and/or summon gods and daemons (if one was Greek), or angels (if one was Judean), to answer their most pressing questions. Jesus and his earliest followers were thoroughly enculturated in this world, using common means of accessing divine knowledge to construct an alternative set of power relations.

Non-ASC techniques of divination

Diocletian's Great Persecution was sparked by the failure of his ritual specialists to discern special marks on the livers of sacrificed cattle. This form of divination is called haruspicy (also heptascopy or hepatomancy), and was widely practiced among the peoples of the Ancient Near East thousands of years before the founding of Rome (Pardee 2000, 232). Haruspicy consisted of sacrificing an animal (a rite of exchange) for the purpose of predicting forthcoming events and/or determining an appropriate course of action. The Romans picked up this practice from the Etruscans, creating a college of sixty haruspices of Etruscan descent maintained by the state and excluded from participation in political processes. These haruspices also read and interpreted environmental phenomena such as lightning, thunder, comet showers, and other astral events, for the purpose of predicting and correcting, if possible, the outcome of current events, including epidemics and wars.

Roman writers credited haruspicy with providing the first omens of Julius Caesar's death: "While he was offering sacrifices on the day when he first sat on the golden throne and first appeared in public in a purple robe, no heart was found in the vitals of the votive ox" (Cicero, *De divinatione* 1.119 [Falconer, LCL]). It was a haruspex who allegedly uttered the famous warning to beware the ides of March (Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 8.11.2). The appearance of a comet following Julius Caesar's death was interpreted as signaling the ascent of his soul into the heavens (Suetonius, *Divus Julius* 88). Diocletian's reliance on haruspicy for accessing divine knowledge was, therefore, unexceptional within his historical and cultural context.

Israelite texts demonstrate familiarity with such divinatory practices, e.g., the prophet Ezekiel describes the king of Babylon inspecting livers (Ezek 21:21). Biblical texts forbid such practices (Lev 19:26, 31; Deut 18:10, 14; 1 Sam 28:3), denigrate persons and groups who engage in them (Num 22:7; Isa 2:6; 1 Sam 15:23), and advocate punishing them (Lev 20:6; Deut 13:6; 2 Kgs 17:17; 2 Chr 33:6). Jesus' followers were known for their refusal to participate in many common Greco–Roman ritual practices, especially those associated with the imperial cult or that involved sacrifice. They did, nevertheless, pay attention to divine portents in the natural world, taking notice of lightning, earthquakes, and crowing roosters (Matt 24:27; 26:34, 74–75; 27:54; Luke 17:24; Rev 4:5; 6:12; 8:5; 11:3, 18; 16:18).

Although the Scriptures explicitly condemn divination, augury, soothsaying, sorcery, casting spells, and consulting ghosts, spirits, or the dead (Deut 18:10), Israelites, Judeans, and Christ-followers were just as interested as anyone else in the ancient world in determining God's will in advance, if they could. While they opposed some forms of divination, such as reading the entrails of sacrificial animals, they appreciated and adapted others for their own purposes, as we can see in Table 3.2.

Casting lots, as method of divination, is attested in ancient Near Eastern, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman texts. The process consists of throwing "lots" (stones, beans, pieces of wood) into a container such as a pouch or helmet or whatever is at hand. This is shaken up and down until one of them leaps, springs, jumps, or is cast

TABLE 3.2 Non-ASC techniques of divination common in the ancient world

Non-ASC techniques of divination	Greco–Roman evidence	Israelite/Judean evidence	Jesus/Early Church evidence
Casting lots: a ritual accompanied by prayer of shaking beans, stones, or wooden tables to see which sprang out	*Iliad* 3.315–25, 7.179–80 Used at Delphi Temple of Fortuna Primigenia (Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.86)	*Urim & Thummim* (Exod 28:15–30; Lev 16:8–22; Num 27:21; Josh 7:14–18, 18:6–28; Judg 1:1, 20:18; 1 Sam 10:20–22; 14:37–42; 2 Sam 2:1, 5:23–24; 1 Chr 24:5, 31; 25:8–9; Ezra 2:63; Jonah 7)	Used to select leaders (e.g., Acts 1:21–26; 20:28; Clement of Alexandria, *Quis Dives* 41)
Augury: observing and interpreting the activity of particular birds and/or other environmental signs	College of Augurs selected from Rome's patrician ranks, later open to plebeians	Forbidden (Lev 19:26, 31; Deut 18:10, 14; 1 Sam 28:3)	Portents: lightning, earthquakes, crowing roosters (Matt 24:27; 26:34, 74–75; 27:54; Luke 17:24; Rev 4:5; 6:12; 8:5; 11:3,18; 16:18)
Astral divination: sky phenomena can be signs from the gods, practice of astrology	Manilius, *Astronomicon* Emperors used astrology as a propaganda tool when it suited them, tried to limit access to it[4]	Horoscopes at Qumran (4Q186; 4Q534) Moses as astrologer, e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 1.154–168 Astral warning of Jerusalem's destruction, Josephus *B.J.* 6.288–91, 6:314–15 Planets provide omens Philo, *Opif. Mundi* 58	Star at Jesus' birth (Matt 2:1–12); Book of Revelation[5]; In Christ, liberated from *stoicheia* (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20–22) Condemned in Didache 3.4

out. Prayer invoking the god whose decision or judgment is sought accompanies the process (Kitz 2000). The heroes of the *Iliad* cast lots to determine who fought whom. As we have seen, lot casting at Delphi determined the order of presentation to the *Pythia*. A famous lot oracle was a feature of the temple of Fortune at Praeneste near Rome (Cicero, *De divinatione* 2.86). The vestments of Israel's high priest included a jewel-encrusted pouch, containing an instrument of decision known as the Urim and Thummim (Exod 28:15–30). It consisted of two or more lots (Prov 16:33) used to determine God's judgment regarding military actions, allocation of land, legal verdicts in the absence of evidence, and the choice of leaders. The followers of Jesus select a replacement for Judas Iscariot by casting lots (Acts 1:21–26). References to the Holy Spirit making or marking out persons as bishops

suggests that the practice continued in the early church for some time (Acts 20:28; Clement of Alexandria, *Quis Dives* 42).

Interest in astral divination was widespread in the ancient Mediterranean world. The astral sciences of astrology and astronomy were stereotypically associated with the "Chaldeans" who were thought to be the inhabitants of Babylonia or a special class of Babylonian priests. Some Greeks, however, credited the Egyptians for the discovery of these sciences (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.4.1; Plato, *Timaeus* 22a–c), supported by an Egyptian tradition positing that the Babylonian astrologers were emigrants from Egypt (Diodorus Siculus 1.81.6). A Judean source alleges that Abraham brought astrology from Ur of the Chaldeans to Egypt (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.154–168), while a Roman source traces the origins of "this great and holy science" to the god Mercury (Manilius, *Astronomicon* 1.25–37)

In the early imperial period, astral divination emerged as an alternative to more traditional Roman techniques of accessing divine knowledge. It proved to be simultaneously a useful propaganda tool and a source of anxiety for imperial rulers. In 11 CE, Augustus outlawed astrological consultations about his death, and forbid the practice of private astral divination. This did not prohibit his successors from retaining court astrologers, or from using astral divination to prop up their regimes and identify potential rivals and successors (Campion 2009; Reed 2004).

Astral divination is present among Judeans during the Second Temple period. Alexander Jannaeus' election to kingship was divinely affirmed by an alleged conjunction of Jupiter (the king star) and Saturn (the seventh star heralding the Judean Sabbath) in Pisces in the year of his birth (126 BCE). Jannaeus' introduction of coins bearing an eight-pointed star combined this astrological information with the biblical prophecy of Numbers 24:17. Another conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces occurred at the vernal equinox of 7 BCE. Herod the Great may have interpreted it as a threat to his power, contributing to the murder of his wife, sons, and a host of enemies (Von Stuckrud 2000, 29–30).

At Qumran, horoscopes were used to discover the disposition of potential new members (4Q186; 4Q534). The community also practiced *brontologia*, a technique for predicting the future by reading omens of thunder in connection with the moon's path through the zodiac (4Q318). Philo describes the planets as signs of future events that influence agriculture and human fertility (*Opif.* 58, 101, 113, 117) and presents the twelve stones in the high priest's breastplate as corresponding to the twelve signs of the zodiac (*Spec. Leg.* 1.87). Josephus similarly asserts that the seven branches of the menorah correspond to the seven planets (*B.J.* 5.217–218). He reports the presence of astral signs, including a comet visible for an entire year prior to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which residents misinterpreted or ignored (*B.J.* 6:288–291, 314–315).

Knowledge of astral divination informs the story of the star that leads the magi to Bethlehem (Matt 2:1–12), Jesus' final discourse revealing the fate of the Temple (Mark 13:1–37//Matt 24:1–44//Luke 21:5–33), and is the foundation of the book of Revelation (Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003, 361–63; Malina and Pilch 2000). Paul's reference to being liberated from *stoicheia* (the elements) may be a reference

to astral powers (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20–22). The Didache explicitly condemns reading omens, astrology, magic, and enchantments, regarding them as the slippery slope to idolatry (3.4). The church fathers commended the study of the stars (astronomy) but condemned astrology, arguing against the widespread notion that the movement of the stars (or fate) determined people's lives (Stramara 2002).

This survey of various techniques of divination shows us that Greeks, Romans, Israelites, Judeans and the followers of Jesus were very interested in accessing knowledge from the gods. It demonstrates that Diocletian's recourse to haruspicy really was unexceptional for a Roman ruler.

The questions that remain have to do with the sign of the cross, the alleged cause of the ritual failure, to which we turn now.

The sign of the cross

As previously stated, Jesus' crucifixion was a serious obstacle of both Judeans and non-Israelites. Hebrew scripture declares that anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse (Deut 21:23). Cicero regarded even the word "cross" as too offensive, too unworthy to be even mentioned within the hearing of free citizens (*Pro Rabirio* 16). Seneca argued that suicide was preferable to enduring death on a cross, writing:

> Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly tumors on chest and shoulders, and draw the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? I think he would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross!
> *(Seneca, Epistulae Morales 101.14 [Gummere, LCL]).*

For Josephus, crucifixion was "the most wretched of deaths" (*B.J.* 7.203), while Origen called it the "utterly vile death" (*Commentary on Matthew* 27:22). Crucifixion was a humiliating and degrading punishment reserved for runaway slaves, criminals, pirates, and enemies of the state. Jesus' crucifixion was thus highly problematic. Even when presented alongside the experience of the resurrection, it remained a stumbling block and foolishness.

Yet, the evidence is clear that by the time of Diocletian making the sign of the cross on one's forehead had become a significant Christian symbolic act. Writing in the previous century, Tertullian (ca. 155–240 CE) attests that:

> At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign. If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer.
> *(De Corona Militis III–IV; ANF 3:95–96)*

Here Tertullian asserts that the sign of the cross was rooted in the traditions and customs of the church rather than in any particular scriptural instruction. That did not prevent him from supplying a biblical antecedent for the practice in his treatise *Against Marcion*. Tertullian writes that Christ signed the apostles and the faithful with "the very seal" spoken of by Ezekiel (9:4). He describes this sign as the Greek letter *Tau*, which is the very form of the cross. This sign, together with the church's sacraments and offerings of sacrifice, glorifies God. With these practices, Christ-followers are urged to "burst forth, and declare that the Spirit of the Creator prophesies of your Christ" (*Against Marcion* 3.22; *ANF* 3:341). For Tertullian, the sign of the cross is not just a symbol of Christian identity; it is a means of public proclamation (Longenecker 2015, 29–30).

In Ezekiel 9:4, God's angelic messengers are instructed to put a mark (Hebrew *tav*) on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over the abominations committed in Jerusalem. This *tav* depicted as an equilateral cross, either standing (+) or reclining (x), would serve as a mark of protection. This mark is treated as a symbol of eschatological protection and salvation in the Damascus Document (19:9–13) and in the Psalms of Solomon (15:6), suggesting a Judean origin for the identifying symbol of Christ's followers (Longenecker 2015, 57). Certainly, Tertullian and other early Christian writers went to some lengths to demonstrate that the sign of the cross was predicted in the scriptures.[6]

So, when Diocletian's Christ-following attendants "put the immortal sign on their foreheads," what did they think they were doing? Did they employ the sign of the cross to protect themselves from being profaned by the emperor's idolatrous practices? Did they imagine they were proclaiming the victory of Christ over the gods of Rome? Did they intend to cause a ritual failure? As Lactantius tells the story, making the sign of the cross caused the *daemons* to flee, overpowered by the sign of the cross. The rhetoric of the narrative leads us to read the sign of the cross as more than a symbolic, perhaps apotropaic, gesture. It becomes a ritual act constructing and promoting an alternate set of power relations rooted in divine knowledge revealed in the story of Jesus and a christological interpretation of ancient prophetic texts.

Conclusion

One can, of course, study rituals in the ancient world and in the early church without the aid of social-scientific concepts, theories, or models. There are, however, advantages to making use of social-science approaches, as I hope is evident in this chapter. Bell's work on ritual provides an etic model, a cognitive map for observing, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing and analyzing ancient ritual practices. It helps us to see that a visit to an oracle in the Greco–Roman world involved a complex of different kinds of rites in addition to the central rite of divination. A cognitive map like Bell's alerts us to details in gospel texts that point to ritual activity as the circumstances in which divine instruction was received (e.g., Acts 13:2). When reading New Testament texts that provide only the briefest of allusions to ritual

activity, our cognitive maps and models can lead us to explore contemporaneous or culturally similar groups that were engaged in ritual practices such as fasting, prayer, or accessing divine knowledge. What we learn through such comparative studies will be suggestive, providing us with scenarios that are more probable than those we would generate on the basis of our personal experiences. More specifically, Bell's work helps us understand that early Christian ritual gatherings provided more than just the context for the recitation of the texts we study. The ritual practices of the early church created Christ-followers, defined the "way" of Jesus, constructed "Christian" meanings and values, and orchestrated a cosmic framework in which making the sign of the cross was both protection and proclamation, especially in the midst of the Roman emperor's rites of divination.

Notes

1   Other early Christian sources associate this verdict with a Pythian oracle, perhaps at Daphne, consulted to determine the cause of the ritual failures (see Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 2.48–60; Digeser, 2004 75).
2   At the time, Lactantius, a Latin-speaking North African of Berber origin, was serving by imperial appointment as professor of rhetoric in the capital city of Nicomedia. While serving in this capacity he converted to Christianity, but resigned his office just before the emperor's edict went into effect on February 24, 303 CE.
3   Plutarch served as a priest at Delphi for about twenty years and provides much firsthand information about the oracle in his work *De Pythiae oraculis*.
4   Campion 2009, 229–42; Reed 2004, 119–58.
5   Malina and Pilch 2000.
6   Epistle of Barnbas 11–12; Cyprian, *Testimonies against the Jews* Book 2. 21, 22, also cites Ezek 9:4; Origen reports how a Judean who believes in Christ interpreted the Hebrew letter *tav* as predicting the mark placed on the foreheads of Christians (*Patrologia Graeca* 13:800–801 quoted in Longenecker 2015, 59).

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PART II

Group interactions

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4

BOUNDARY-CROSSING IN CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Agnes Choi

When studying the ancient world, it is important to understand not only the categories that organized ancient life, but also the boundaries that separated those categories. While many (though not all) of these boundaries were permeable, it was not a simple matter to cross a boundary, because the movement from one category into another effected changes to one's status and identity. Thus, in order to pass safely from one side of a boundary to the other, the individual or group participated in boundary-crossing rituals. In the Hellenistic (Greek) and Roman periods, there existed a variety of boundary-crossing rituals that involved various tasks and stages. Some of these rituals marked the passage from one life stage into the next (e.g., from childhood to adulthood), while others marked the entry into a particular group.

The ritual most frequently associated with entry into the early Christian community is baptism. While baptism has frequently been studied from a theological perspective, it will be seen in this essay that the use of ritual theory can illuminate aspects of baptism that might otherwise escape our attention. Ritual theorists have stressed the importance of studying rituals in their social context (e.g., Bell 1997, 171; Grimes 1990, 90). For the early Christians, this context was shaped by Greek and Roman rule, as well as by Jewish traditions and history. Thus, Christian baptism will be considered in its Greco–Roman context, as well as in relation to Second Temple Judaism. It will be argued that the ritual of baptism played an important role in the early Christians' process of self-definition by conveying not only who they were, but also who they were not. To that end, it will be necessary first to consider how to classify the ritual of baptism and then to examine how baptism contributed to Christian self-definition in both positive and negative ways.

Baptism as ritual

Ritual theorists have developed different systems of classification for analyzing ritual activities. It is important to consider what type of ritual baptism might be, as its classification can direct our attention to ritual functions that might otherwise be overlooked.

At first glance, baptism appears to be a rite of passage, a term originally coined by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep. Rites of passage mark a person's transition from one stage of life to the next, and van Gennep argues that they consist of three stages: rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation (Victor Turner follows van Gennep in speaking of three similar stages: separation, marginality/liminality, and aggregation) (van Gennep 1960, 10–11; Turner 1969, 94). By advancing through these three stages, the individual or group participating in the rite "leaves behind one social group and its concomitant social identity and passes through a stage of no identity or affiliation before admission into another social group that confers a new identity" (Bell 1997, 95). Van Gennep points to marriage as an example of a rite of passage, whereby the person participates in rites of separation that disconnect them from their single status. This is followed by transition rites that mark the betrothal period. During this period, the person exists in a liminal state, being neither single nor married. Finally, the person participates in rites of incorporation—a wedding and attendant rites—that conduct the person into their new married status, with the accompanying rights and responsibilities (van Gennep 1960, 11). While rites of passage are typically associated with movement through different life stages, van Gennep argues that they can also mark a person's entry into a group whose membership is not associated with a particular stage of life (van Gennep 1960, 65).

Some interpreters of the New Testament have found a close correspondence between baptism and van Gennep's tripartite model and have argued that baptism is, in fact, a rite of passage. One example may be found in Wayne A. Meeks' *The First Urban Christians* (Meeks 1983, 150–57; see also McVann 1994). Meeks identifies prominent themes about baptism in Paul's letters and finds that they may be arranged not only in pairs of opposites, but also in a V-shaped configuration that corresponds to the temporal stages of the ritual. This results in two sets of symmetrical movements. In the first set of movements, the baptizand moves downward from the world to washing/burial (the base of the "V"), indicating the baptizand's separation from the outside world. The baptismal themes of unclothing, dying, and descending are found in this set of movements. In the second set of movements, the baptizand moves upward from washing/burial into the body of Christ, indicating the baptizand's integration into another world. The opposing baptismal themes of reclothing, life, and ascending to the body of Christ are found in this set of movements. In Meeks' view, the progression of descending and ascending actions in baptism along this V-shaped path not only imitates the image of dying and rising with Christ, but also "corresponds to the phases of every initiation or rite of passage: separation, transition, and reaggregation" (Meeks 1983, 156–57). Thus, for

Meeks, baptism constitutes a rite of passage that conducts the baptizand from the world into the body of Christ.

There are difficulties, however, with this analysis. One difficulty concerns the perceived correspondence between the structure of a rite of passage and that of baptism. While van Gennep's model consists of three stages, Meeks finds that the Pauline baptismal themes are best arranged in pairs. The discrepancy between van Gennep's tripartite model and Meeks' binary model may also be observed in Meeks' description of the final status of the baptizand using such language as "nudity, symbolic death, rebirth as a child, [and] abolition of distinctions of role and status" (Meeks 1983, 157). This language corresponds most closely not to the third and final stage of incorporation, but to the second and intermediate stage of transition or liminality. In other words, the rites of incorporation are, in fact, missing (Malina 1985, 349; DeMaris 2008, 18–19). Thus, the binary model of Christian baptism is structurally incompatible with the tripartite model of a rite of passage.

There is a second difficulty with understanding baptism as a rite of passage. According to Meeks' arrangement of opposing pairs, death/dying stands across from life/rising. However, Richard DeMaris correctly observes that "Pauline language of participation in Christ's dying and rising does not refer exclusively and unambiguously to the baptismal rite of initiation" (DeMaris 2008, 19; see also Wedderburn 1987, 381–90). For example, on several occasions, Paul presented his own life in terms of Christ's death and resurrection without reference to baptism (e.g., 2 Cor 4:10–11; Gal 2:19–20; Phil 3:10–11). Further, baptism did not always result in movement to life. For example, in 2 Cor 6:8–9, the believer's post-baptismal life is described using a metaphor of death: "We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive" (see also Rom 6:1–14; Col 3:1–5). Thus, while the language of dying–rising is, in some instances, to be understood sequentially in reference to the initiation process, in other instances it is to be understood existentially in reference to the believer's post-baptismal life in Christ.

Given the difficulties associated with the interpretation of baptism as a rite of passage, it seems prudent to consider an alternative classification of this ritual. In *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Catherine Bell proposes six categories of ritual action. One of these categories is that of political rituals, that is, "those ceremonial practices that specifically construct, display and promote the power of political institutions (such as king, state, the village elders) or the political interests of distinct constituencies and subgroups" (Bell 1997, 128–35, here 128). Political rituals construct and define power in two ways. First, they employ symbols and symbolic actions to portray a group of people as a unified and organized community with common values. Second, these values are legitimized by presenting them as being a natural expression of the values and order of the universe. While they are intended to confirm power, political rituals and the particular construction of power that they affirm can also be challenged, subverted, or overturned entirely.

A consideration of baptism as a political ritual seems ripe with possibilities, not least because religion was embedded in politics in the ancient world. This may

be observed, for instance, in the deification of the Roman emperor, such that the political leader of the Roman Empire was also considered to be a deity. The Jewish Temple in Jerusalem provides another example, for it served religious functions (e.g., the place to offer sacrifices to the Jewish God) as well as political functions (e.g., the high priest was appointed by Rome; the priests served as political liaisons between the Roman rulers and the Jewish people). Given that the early Christian community sought to establish their own place within the Roman Empire and in relation to Judaism, in the remainder of this essay, we will consider baptism as a political ritual, particularly with respect to its contribution to the establishment of power, as well as its challenge to other constructions of power. Specific attention will be given to the ways in which baptism enabled the early Christian community to present itself as a cohesive, organized, and legitimate group, while simultaneously enabling it to challenge Roman power and Jewish tradition. In other words, the ritual of baptism contributed to early Christian self-definition in both positive and negative ways. We will begin with the latter function.

What Christians were not: baptism as negative self-definition

The ritual of baptism was one means by which the early Christians established boundaries for their community. Such boundaries served to clarify not only who was included in the group, but also who was excluded. Ritual theorists have stressed the importance of paying less attention to a ritual's so-called symbolic features, and more attention to a ritual's obvious features, that is, "distinctive features that are immediately available to the senses" (Rappaport 1979, 175). As DeMaris accurately observes, "Perhaps the most obvious feature of baptism was that it employed water" (DeMaris forthcoming).[1] Thus, a consideration of how water was used by Romans, Jews, and Christians is instructive as the differences in its usage by these groups may provide indications about early Christian self-definition, particularly with respect to who they were not.

While water figured prominently in ancient religions, it was more commonly used for bathing both by Greeks and by Romans. Greek baths developed during and slightly before the fifth century BCE and fell into two broad categories: public baths (which could include hip-baths, immersion tubs, sweat-baths, fountains, and/or small pools) and gymnasia (which included bathing facilities) (Nielsen 1990, 1.3, 6–13). The expansion of the Hellenistic Empire was accompanied by the spread of Greek architecture, including Greek baths and gymnasia. That Greek baths were introduced to the Jews by the Seleucid period is evidenced by the bath-houses that have been excavated in Israel and dated to this period. These include the elaborate Greek bath in the northeast corner of the Maccabean castle at Gezer/Gazara (approximately 30 kilometers west of Jerusalem) (Macalister 1912, 1.223–28; Hoss 2005, 39). Another Greek bath was excavated at Beth-Zur (approximately 32 kilometers south of Jerusalem), which, though smaller than the bath at Gezer, was similar in design (Sellers 1933, 16–18; Sellers et al. 1968, 1–2; Hoss 2005, 39). Simple Greek baths have also been excavated at Beth-Yerah and Mount Gerizim (Hoss

2005, 38). One also finds literary evidence referring to the construction of gymnasia in Jerusalem (e.g., 1 Macc 1:11–15).

As Roman baths were modeled after the Greek public baths, it comes as no surprise that Roman bathing practices were, in some respects, similar to those of the Greeks. This can be observed, for instance, in the use of hip-baths and tubs by both groups. In other respects, however, Roman bathing practices were more complex. A visit to a Roman bath typically involved advancing through a series of rooms that served different functions based on the amount and type of heat provided. The bathing routine also included anointing with oil, removing the oil (along with sweat and dirt) by scraping it off with a strigil (a curved metal blade similar to a spoon), and finally applying perfumes, ointments, and cosmetics. Bathers socialized with one another and availed themselves of other services at Roman baths that ranged from massages, to entertainment, to eating and drinking (Fagan 1999, 10; Yegül 2010, 12–13, 16–20). Roman baths were first used widely by Herod the Great in his palaces, including two at Herodium, four in the Winter Palaces at Jericho, and two at Masada (Nielsen 1990, 2.41–42; Netzer 1999).

While the Jews used water for personal bathing like the Greeks and the Romans, they also used water for ritual washing. The late Second Temple Period saw the introduction of ritual washing by full immersion in a stepped water installation called a *miqveh* (pl. *miqva'ot*). *Miqva'ot* could not be prefabricated, transported, and then installed. Rather, they had to be dug into the earth or hewn into bedrock so that they held water to a depth of at least three cubits (approximately 1.4 meters; b. 'Erub. 14b) and a volume of at least forty *se'ahs* (approximately 250–1000 liters; m. Miqw. 1:7) (Hoss 2005, 108; Lawrence 2006, 164). While the earliest *miqva'ot* are dated to the Hasmonean period, most of the excavated *miqva'ot* range from the Herodian period (first century BCE) to the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE). While they have been excavated in Samaria, Galilee, and the Golan, the vast majority of *miqva'ot* dated to the Second Temple Period appear in Judaea. They have been found in a variety of spaces, including in private residences and near the Temple, synagogues, gravesites, agricultural installations (especially wine and oil presses), and bath-houses (Hoss 2005, 115; Reich 1988, 105–6).

That the introduction of Roman baths and changes vis-à-vis ritual washing in Judaism, particularly in the proliferation of *miqva'ot*, occurred in the same historical period and the same geographical area raises questions about Jewish views of Roman bathing culture. The very presence of Roman baths in Israel is evidence that at least some Jews adopted Roman bathing practices, as they found nothing objectionable about them. Other Jews, however, may have had reservations about or objections to this public institution.

Although Second Temple literature offers no comments about Roman bathing culture, we can find discussions in later rabbinic literature about a number of halakhic problems in relation to Roman baths. These include the difficulty of heating water on the Sabbath (m. Makš. 2:5), the decoration of baths with sculptures and painted images of humans (m. 'Abod. Zar. 3:4), collective nudity (m. Meg. 3:2), and the nudity of mixed groups of men and women, particularly with respect to issues

of purity and impurity (m. Nid. 9:3; t. Nid. 6:15; b. Ḥag. 20a) (Reich 1988, 103). In spite of these difficulties, Ronny Reich posits that a passage in b. Šabb. 13b–14a ratified legislation from the first century BCE to the effect that Roman baths (which he refers to as "hot bath-houses") were not banned, but required observant users to immerse in a *miqveh* afterwards (Reich 1988, 104–5). In support of this position, Reich points to the remains of four "hot bath-rooms" that have been excavated in the Upper City of Jerusalem. These were not complete bath-houses, but "a room in a private house provided with a *hypocaust* [heating system] and turned into a 'hot room' (*caldarium*)" (Reich 1988, 104; see also Avigad 1980, 139, 142 and Lawrence 2006, 181–82). It is significant to note that in every case, a *miqveh* was found in close proximity to the Roman bathroom of these private houses. For some Jews, then, engaging in Roman bathing practices was acceptable only if it was followed by immersion in a *miqveh* to restore one's ritual purity.

While some Jews accepted Roman bathing practices (with or without immersing in a *miqveh* afterwards), other Jews resisted. In *Baths and Bathing*, Stefanie Hoss suggests that indications of resistance to Roman bathing culture may be found in the continued construction of Greek baths even into the late first century CE and the comparatively late appearance of Roman baths in Israel. While she acknowledges that Roman baths were more difficult to build than Greek baths, Hoss argues that other factors led to the relatively late adoption of Roman bathing practices by Jews in Israel (compared to other Roman provinces). These included restraint toward public nakedness, the relatively late urbanization of Palestine (including the infrastructure necessary for Roman baths), and the detrimental impact of two rebellions—the First and Second Revolts of the Jews against the Romans (66/67–70 CE and 132–135 CE, respectively)—on the economy such that monies for public buildings were less readily available. However, according to Hoss, the principal reason for the late development of Roman baths in Israel was the strongly Hellenized culture found in Israel. The strong embrace of Hellenistic culture, according to Hoss, amounted to resistance to Rome, evidenced by the belated adoption of Roman bathing culture (Hoss 2005, 92–94).

In a word, while Jews ultimately accepted Roman bathing culture, in some segments of Jewish society, this acceptance came slowly and, one might argue, rather grudgingly, as evidenced by the requirement that the use of a Roman bath-house be followed by ritual immersion in a *miqveh*. Given that Jewish use of water was, at least in part, an expression of resistance to Roman influence and power, and given that Christianity had its roots in Judaism, it is worth considering what the early Christians' use of water indicated about their position with respect to Roman society and Judaism. As Christianity was controversial and illegal in the Roman Empire during the first centuries of the Common Era, it will be important to bear in mind that any challenge or resistance on the part of the early Christians against the surrounding society would necessarily have been subtle in nature.

One area in which Christians differed from both Romans and Jews pertained to the frequency of bathing. Roman bathing rituals were undertaken daily; Martial (b. 38–41 CE; d. 101–4 CE) recommended the "eighth hour" (i.e., two or three o'clock in the afternoon) as the best time to bathe (*Epigrams* 10.48 [Shackleton Bailey, Loeb

Classical Library]) (Yegül 2010, 11). In contrast, Christian baptism was undertaken only once. While Christians in the first century CE were not at liberty to openly challenge Roman rule, Jerome (345–420 CE), writing in a later period, was free to state this explicitly: "Is your skin rough and scurfy without baths? He who has once washed in Christ needs not to wash again" (*Epist.* 14.10 [Wright, LCL]).

While the Parting of the Ways (i.e., the process by which Christianity ceased to be a sect within Judaism and became a separate religion) would not be fully effected for several more centuries, Christians sought to distinguish themselves from the Jews in various ways even during the first and second centuries CE. For example, Luke, Paul, and the anonymous author of Hebrews wrote of a "new covenant" that would replace or supersede the Jewish covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24). The early Christians also distinguished themselves from the Jews in their use of water. Like the Romans, Jews also undertook repeated ritual washings, for one must wash or bathe each time one became ritually impure. For example, one Jewish sect, the Qumranites, is known to have practiced daily immersion to ensure each individual's ritual purity (1QS 5:13; Josephus, *B.J.* 2.129). In *De baptismo* 15, a treatise on baptism, Tertullian (b. ca. 160 CE) contrasted the daily washings by Jews with Christian baptism, which was a one-time event:

> So then, we enter into the bath once only, once only are our sins washed away, because these ought not to be committed a second time. Jewish Israel, on the other hand, washes every day, because every day it is defiled.
>
> *(Evans 1964, 33, 35)*

Thus, the daily washings of Romans and Jews stood in contrast with the singular event of Christian baptism.

The source of water was another area in which Romans, Jews, and Christians differed. The water for Roman baths was drawn from wells, cisterns, and reservoirs or was transported through Roman aqueducts (Yegül 2010, 97–100; Nielsen 1990, 1.23–24). In contrast, water for Jewish *miqva 'ot* must be "living water," that is, it must collect naturally. Thus, spring water and rainwater that collected naturally (i.e., by gravity or through water channels) were acceptable (Hoss 2005, 109; Lawrence 2006, 165). However, water collected by the activity of human hands was not acceptable: "These render the Immersion-pool [i.e., *miqveh*] invalid and do not serve to fill up its measure: [drawn] *water*, whether clean or unclean, water in which food has been pressed or seethed; unfermented grape-skin wine" (m. Miqw. 7:2, emphasis added [Danby 1933, 740]). The Didache, an early Christian treatise, provides the earliest statement about the kind of water that was to be used in Christian baptism:

> As for baptism, baptize in this way: Having said all this beforehand, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in running water. If you do not have running water, however, baptize in another kind of water; if you cannot [do so] in cold [water], then [do so] in warm [water].
>
> *(Did. 7:1–2; Niederwimmer 1998, 125)*

Thus, the natural sources of water used for ritual purposes both by Jews and by Christians differed from the mechanically derived sources of water used in the Roman baths. In contrast with the Romans, the Jews deemed acceptable only living water, that is, standing water that had collected naturally. Like the Jews, the early Christians deemed living water to be an acceptable source of water; however, unlike the Jews, they preferred natural running water to natural standing water.

While all of the early Christians distinguished themselves both from the Romans and from the Jews in the frequency and water source of their ritual of baptism, the abundance of evidence emerging from Corinth illustrates in detail how a particular group of early Christians expressed their resistance to Roman rule in their use of water. Water was not simply an essential component in Roman bathing culture, but was an expression of Roman rule. In order to understand how water signified Roman rule, it is necessary to begin with the use of water in Hellenistic Corinth. During the Hellenistic period, water was used extensively for cultic purposes. This is attested, for example, in Corinth's Temple of Asklepios, where a spring house, a fountain house, and several reservoirs have been excavated. Also of note is a water basin with accompanying supply and waste pipes by the temple's altar and entrance, which provided water for purification prior to sacrifice and entry into the temple. A lustral room accompanied by an elaborate system of water circulation has also been excavated, which "demonstrate[s] how important bathing was to the religious rites that prepared one for incubating in the temple" (DeMaris 2008, 48; see also Roebuck 1951, 24, 26–27, 46–51). Water was also used extensively in Corinth's Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. This is attested by the water jugs and more than a dozen sacral water basins dating to the Hellenistic period, as well as the bathing areas near the dining rooms (DeMaris 2008, 48–49; 1995, 107–8).

The ritual use of water that characterized Hellenistic Corinth came to an abrupt end in 146 BCE when the Romans destroyed Corinth. In 44 BCE, Corinth was resettled as a Roman colony. A variety of water projects marked the beginnings of Roman Corinth. These projects included the renovation and expansion of the harbor at Lechaion, as well as the building of public fountains, public baths, and the aqueduct from Lake Stymphalus in the Arcadian uplands (DeMaris 2008, 46). It is significant to note that in her discussion of political rituals, Bell identifies display as "one of the most prominent strategies by which political rituals define a community of ordered and legitimate power relationships" (Bell 1997, 129). Certainly, the water projects undertaken by the Romans were a constant and ostentatious reminder of Roman might. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Romans "understood the mastery of water as a key indicator of Roman control and influence, as a form of imperialism, as a means of Romanizing the environment or world" (DeMaris 2008, 46).

On the basis of material evidence from the period between the razing and resettling of Corinth, including pottery and coins, as well as Greek graffiti on early Roman pottery, DeMaris contends that Corinth was occupied during this intervening period by a Greek-speaking population. The population of Roman Corinth, then, would have included indigenous Greek-speakers who preserved

customs and practices from Corinth's Hellenistic past. DeMaris suggests the likelihood that at least some members of this population eventually became members of the Corinthian church. If this proposal is correct, then the use of water in Christian baptism provided "an outlet for a local Greek religiosity that could no longer come to expression in the sacred landscape that Rome was creating on Greek soil" (DeMaris 2008, 50–53, here 53). Given the risks involved with baldly resisting Roman colonization, it is unsurprising that the Corinthian Christians signaled their resistance to Roman rule in subtle ways. The adoption of water in the ritual of baptism allowed the Corinthian Christians to appear to acquiesce to Roman hegemony (as expressed in the control of water). For the Corinthian Christians, however, their use of water functioned as a veiled reference to its ritual use in the period preceding the arrival of Roman power.

In short, by carefully considering Roman, Jewish, and Christian use of water, one sees more clearly the boundaries separating these groups. Although Judaism ostensibly accepted Roman influence, this acceptance was rather grudging, as indicated by the changes in Jewish ritual washing that accompanied the arrival of Roman baths (i.e., full immersion in *miqva'ot*), as well as the late and conditional acceptance of Roman bathing culture. Because water was used in Christian baptism in ways that differed from both the Romans and the Jews, it contributed to Christian self-definition; that is, it signaled their separation from and resistance to those groups. Given the precarious status of the early Christians, the expression of their resistance to these powers was necessarily subtle: differences in the frequency of (ritual) bathing, the preference for a different water source, and (in the case of the Corinthian Christians) the allusion to a time without Roman rule. The ritual of Christian baptism, however, did not simply function negatively to convey who Christians were not. Rather, it also served a positive function to convey who Christians were. It is this function to which we now turn.

What Christians were: baptism as positive self-definition

Thus far, it has been argued that the ritual of baptism contributed to negative self-definition by enabling the early Christians to signal that they were distinct from both the Romans and the Jews. At the same time, the ritual of baptism contributed to positive self-definition by establishing and conveying certain characteristics of the early Christian community. Consideration of baptism as a political ritual directs our attention to the construction of power through symbols and symbolic actions that present a group as united, organized, and legitimate. As Bell states, rituals "present and validate the social hierarchy indirectly depicted by them" (Bell 1992, 42). Similarly, Rappaport states that "by performing a liturgical order the performer accepts, and indicates to himself and to others that he accepts, whatever is encoded in the canons of the liturgical order in which he is participating" (Rappaport 1979, 193). Thus, it is useful to consider what baptism communicated about the unity, order, and legitimacy of the early Christian community. It will be seen that the construction of Christian identity was achieved, at least in part, through the somewhat

counter-intuitive process of adopting various components from the very groups from which they sought to distinguish themselves, namely from Roman and Jewish culture and society.

That the ritual of baptism signified the unity of the Christian community may be deduced from the baptismal formula used, namely that all baptizands were baptized "in(to) the name of Jesus" (e.g., Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; see also Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 1:13, 15; 6:11; Gal 3:27). The connection between baptism and unity was more explicitly expressed in an early Christian baptismal liturgy found in Galatians (Betz 1979, 181–201; Martyn 1997, 373–83):

> As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.
>
> *(Gal 3:27–28; see also Col 3:10–11)*

Elsewhere, Paul linked unity to baptism using the metaphor of the body:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
>
> *(1 Cor 12:12–13; see also Eph 4:4–6)*

Thus, baptism arguably functioned as a political ritual by conveying the unity of the Christian community.

The unity signified in baptism was expressed in the early Christian community using the language and concepts of the Greco–Roman kinship system. It is important to bear in mind that ancient conceptions of kinship were not limited to the nuclear family, but encompassed the extended family and household slaves, as well as clients, dependent workers, and former slaves (MacDonald 2010, 29). That the early Christians adopted this system in their self-understanding can be observed, for example, in references to the early Christian community as a household or a family (e.g., Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19; see also Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 8:12; Gal 1:2; Heb 3:6; 1 Pet 2:17).

The adoption of the kinship system expressed not only the unity of the early Christian community, but also the order within it. The ancient household could be organized into three pairs of relationships: husband–wife, master–slave, and father–child (e.g., Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1253b–1260b26; MacDonald 2010, 29–43). That the early Christians adopted this system of social organization may be observed in the household codes in several early Christian texts that are arranged using the same three pairs of relationships (e.g., Eph 5:21–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1). Moreover, this system conveyed ritual and fictive kinship. The husband–wife relationship may be observed, for example, in depictions of Christ as the bridegroom and the church

as the bride (e.g., Eph 5:21–33; Rev 19:7, 9; 21:9). The master–slave relationship may be observed in depictions of God or Christ as the master and Christians as slaves (e.g., Luke 17:10; Acts 16:17; Eph 6:6; Phil 1:1; 1 Pet 2:16; Rev 19:5; 22:3). Finally, the father–child relationship may be observed in depictions of God as the father to believing children (e.g., Rom 8:14–17; Gal 3:26; 4:4–7; Eph 2:18; Col 1:12; Heb 12:7; Rev 21:7). The logical consequence of depicting the relationship between God and believer as father to child was the depiction of the relationship among believers as a sibling relationship. This may be observed in the application of the Greek term *adelphoi* to Christian believers. This term is frequently translated as "brothers and sisters" (e.g., Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 11:33; Gal 6:18; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 3:1; Jas 1:2; 2 Pet 1:10; 1 John 3:13); however, it is sometimes translated as "beloved" (e.g., Phil 1:12; 2 Thess 3:6; Jas 5:7) or "friends" (e.g., Acts 6:3; Rom 7:4; 2 Cor 11:9; Gal 4:28, 31; Heb 10:19). One entered into the Christian family by undergoing baptism. Paul, for instance, embedded language drawn from an early Christian baptismal liturgy into his description of believers as children, heirs, and adoptees of God (Gal 3:26–4:7). Thus, "baptism, which brought new members into the group, was in effect a mechanism for crossing the familial threshold and establishing kinship bonds" (DeMaris 2013, 15).

While the early Christians' adoption of the Greco–Roman kinship system contributed to their self-understanding, providing both a metaphor for unity and a system of order, this unity and order was not fully realized in some of the early Christian communities. The Corinthian church, for example, struggled with the problem of factionalism, as divisions developed between the Corinthian believers who variously attached themselves to Paul, Apollos, Cephas (i.e., Peter), or Christ (1 Cor 1:10–4:21). It is interesting to note, however, that Paul began his discussion of this problem with references to baptism (1 Cor 1:11–17). By doing so, "Paul implies that the conflicting loyalties that threaten group unity stem at least in part from who baptized whom" (DeMaris 2013, 12). In this instance, undergoing baptism did not result in the development of unity between believers inducted into a single family. Rather, disunity developed as baptizands devoted themselves to baptizers.

The order embodied in the Greco–Roman kinship system entailed a tension between hierarchicalism (father–child) and egalitarianism (sibling–sibling). This tension was addressed in different ways in various early Christian communities. As a political ritual, baptism signified that the baptizand was gaining membership into a group that was organized in a particular way. In each of the New Testament accounts of baptism, hierarchicalism is evident. The baptizands are presented not as baptizing themselves, but as being baptized by another person; that is, they did not assume an active role, but a passive role. As DeMaris correctly observes, "this subordination [is] reinforced in the movement the baptizand makes along a vertical axis in the course of the rite, going down into the water and coming up out of it (Acts 8.38–39)" (DeMaris 2000, 21). Thus, the ritual of baptism established the baptizand–baptizer relationship as one of inferiority–superiority; it may even "have [had] implications for the baptizand's status in the community" (DeMaris 2013, 14). This hierarchical order may be observed not only in the relationship between baptizer

and baptizand, but also between evangelist and convert. Paul, for example, described himself as the father of those he successfully evangelized (1 Cor 4:15; Phlm 10; see also 1 Thess 2:11). Hierarchicalism may also be observed in the depiction of the church as a body consisting of parts with greater or lesser honor (1 Cor 12:22–24), as well as in the ordering of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:28).

Not all early Christian communities, however, were organized hierarchically. Thus, those communities that were organized in an egalitarian fashion were compelled to reinterpret baptismal traditions that conveyed hierarchicalism. On the basis of such texts as Mark 9:33–37 and 10:41–45, in which Jesus gave priority to servanthood, the Markan community has been understood to have adopted an egalitarian social structure. The hierarchicalism encoded in the ritual of baptism, then, would have undermined the community's egalitarianism. DeMaris contends that Mark sought to rectify this in his account of Jesus' baptism in at least two ways. First, the roles of the superior baptizer and the inferior baptizand were reversed, for Jesus (who was superior) was portrayed as being baptized by John the Baptist (who was inferior). Thus, "this positioning anticipated and thus counteracted the hierarchy expected to emerge between baptizer and baptizand" (DeMaris 2000, 22). Second, in the baptismal vision that immediately followed Jesus' baptism, a voice from heaven stated, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). This statement explicitly elevated Jesus, demonstrating that "a humbling act produced exaltation" (DeMaris 2000, 22). DeMaris concludes, then, that "from the standpoint of the Markan *Sitz im Leben* … the function of Mk 1.9–11 is clear: it reconciled Markan community ritual to the desired community organization" (DeMaris 2000, 22).

In a word, by adopting the Greco–Roman kinship system, the early Christian community expressed its unity and order, both of which were also denoted in the ritual of baptism. Nevertheless, the unity denoted in the ritual of baptism was, in some early Christian communities, an aspiration rather than an actuality. Moreover, the hierarchical order denoted in this ritual was countered in those early Christian communities that were organized according to egalitarian principles.

Early Christianity also adopted various components from Judaism, albeit in less obvious ways. In order to understand the construction of Christian identity vis-à-vis the adoption of features from Judaism, it is necessary to first consider Jewish identity and its construction. While Judaism has come to be understood as referring to a particular religion, the term *Ioudaios* (from which the English word "Judaism" derives) was not always understood in this way. Prior to the second century BCE, *Ioudaios* referred to a Judaean (i.e., a function of birth or geography). Over the course of the Second Temple Period, however, *Ioudaios* also came to refer to a Jew (i.e., a function of religion or culture) or a citizen or ally of the Judaean state (i.e., a function of politics) (Cohen 1999, 70–104). So long as *Ioudaios* functioned only as an ethnic–geographic indicator, the boundary between Jews and Gentiles (i.e., non-Jews) remained impermeable. After *Ioudaios* began to function as a cultural or religious term, however, it became possible for a Gentile to cross the boundary into Judaism. This was achieved, of course, through boundary-crossing rituals.

In *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, Shaye Cohen argues that "becoming a Jew," that is, converting to Judaism, consisted of three elements: veneration of the Jewish God (almost) exclusively; practice of Jewish laws and rituals (e.g., synagogue attendance, Sabbath observance by lighting lamps and fasting); and integration into the Jewish community (Cohen 1999, 149–62). While accounts of conversion to Judaism might include only one or two of these elements, all three elements can be found in the description of the conversion of Achior the Ammonite, who believed firmly in God, was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel (Jdt 14:10). All three elements are found in Gentile descriptions of conversion to Judaism, as well. Tacitus (b. ca. 56 CE), for instance, wrote that the Jews

> adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference. Those who converted to their ways follow the same practice, and the earliest lesson they receive is to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account.
>
> *(Histories 5.5 [Jackson, LCL])*

Juvenal (ca. 55–140 CE), too, described conversion to Judaism as consisting of denying all other gods ("worship of nothing but the clouds"), observance of the Jewish law (including observance of the Sabbath and dietary laws, and especially circumcision), and hostility toward non-Jews (*Satires* 14.96–106 [Ramsay, LCL]). For the purposes of this study, it is significant to note that in the second century BCE, circumcision, which is mentioned in each of these texts, "achieved prominence … as *the* Jewish ritual" (Cohen 1999, 158, italics original). Thus, undergoing circumcision came to be equated with converting to Judaism.

Christians did not adopt circumcision as a boundary-crossing ritual required for entry into the Christian community. Indeed, Paul stated this in no uncertain terms in his dispute with the Galatian churches over this precise issue: "If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. … For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything" (Gal 5:2, 6; see also Gal 6:15). Nevertheless, Col 2:11–12 states,

> In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision [lit. a circumcision not made by hands], by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

For the author of Colossians, Christians share in Christ's circumcision, that is, his death and resurrection, by undergoing a spiritual circumcision, that is, the ritual of baptism (Lohse 1971, 103). The Christian community itself was also described with the language of circumcision, as may be observed in Phil 3:3: "For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh." Thus, while the early Christians did not adopt the ritual of circumcision, they did adopt the language of circumcision.

Whether the early Christians adopted proselyte baptism from Judaism is difficult to establish, as the origins of proselyte baptism in Judaism is itself unclear (Collins 1989, 32–35; Betz 1995, 100–103). In the preceding section, it was argued that Christianity distinguished itself from Judaism in its use of water in the ritual of baptism. While Jews used standing water in their repeated purificatory rituals, Christians preferred running water in their one-time initiatory ritual. However, in *Washing in Water*, Jonathan Lawrence argues that there is some literary evidence that associates washing not with purification, but with initiation in Judaism. Joseph and Aseneth is a Jewish novella that ostensibly accounts for Gen 41:45, which states that Joseph, an important figure in Jewish history, was given Aseneth, a Gentile, as his wife. The reader learns that this was acceptable because Aseneth converted to Judaism prior to her marriage to Joseph. It is significant to note that at one point in the description of her conversion experience (Jos. Asen. 10:2–17:10), Aseneth was instructed to "wash [her] face and [her] hands with living water, and dress in a new linen robe" (Jos. Asen. 14:12; Burchard 1985, 225). Lawrence also considers Josephus' description of the Essenes, including a discussion of the stages of initiation into this Jewish sect (*B.J.* 2.137–142). During the first year, the initiate was given "white raiment" and "[was] allowed to share the purer kind of holy water" (*B.J.* 2.138 [Thackeray, LCL]). Although neither text explicitly states that washing was an essential component of initiation, for Lawrence, the reference to water in conjunction with the reference to the wearing of new clothes suggests an initiatory context. Thus, he contends that already in the Second Temple Period, there existed some connection in Judaism between washing and initiation (Lawrence 2006, 72–75). If Lawrence is correct, then it is possible, though by no means certain, that Christianity adopted proselyte baptism from Judaism or derived it from the connection between washing and initiation in Judaism.

In addition to circumcision and baptism, conversion to Judaism might be effected through marriage. A Gentile man who married a Jewish woman would not, in all likelihood, enter the Jewish community, as the wife typically joined her husband's household. One might expect, then, that a Gentile woman who married a Jewish man would effectively join the Jewish community, even in the absence of a ritual of conversion (Cohen 1999, 156). There seems to have been some dispute over this matter, however. For example, in Joseph and Aseneth, Joseph refused to be greeted by Aseneth with a kiss, to say nothing of marrying her, on the very grounds that she was not Jewish (Jos. Asen. 8:1–7). The early Christians seem to have inherited this same dispute. For example, in 1 Cor 7:14, Paul stated, "the unbelieving husband is made holy through his [believing] wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her [believing] husband." In a later letter, however, Paul stated,

> Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?
>
> *(2 Cor 6:14–16a)*

In both Judaism and Christianity, then, the issue of conversion by marriage remained open for later generations to address.

Consideration of baptism in light of the functions of political rituals helps to explain why the process of Christian self-definition involved adopting various aspects and features from the very groups from whom the Christians sought to distinguish themselves. Adopting the Greco–Roman kinship system enabled the early Christians to convey both the unity and the organization of their group as baptism was the means of conducting baptizands into the Christian household and its structured relationships. Moreover, the adoption of this widely accepted system legitimized the early Christian community, for its organization would have been perceived as being in alignment with the values and order of the world. In a society that valued tradition and antiquity, the newness of Christianity was a disadvantage. In contrast, Judaism was well-known for its long history. The adoption of the language of circumcision, and perhaps the association of water with initiation, allowed early Christianity to appropriate some of Judaism's antiquity, thereby lending sorely needed credence to their own community. In short, by availing themselves of various aspects of Roman and Jewish culture and society, early Christian identity gained unity, order, and legitimacy.

Conclusion

By considering baptism not as a rite of passage, but as a political ritual, various aspects of baptism hitherto obscured by theological concerns have come to light. In particular, it has become clear that baptism contributed to Christian self-definition negatively by distinguishing the Christians from the Romans and the Jews, particularly in the implicit challenges issued to both of these groups in their respective uses of water. Moreover, baptism contributed to Christian self-definition positively, by indicating its unity, order, and legitimacy through the adoption of the Greco–Roman kinship system, the language of circumcision, and possibly the association of water and initiation. It was no mean feat for the early Christians to strike this delicate balance between distinguishing themselves from the Romans and the Jews and simultaneously adopting components of their cultures and traditions. Clearly, undergoing baptism and crossing the boundary into Christianity, then, was no simple matter.

Note

1   I am heavily indebted to Richard DeMaris for sharing a pre-publication version of this study with me.

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5

RITUALS FOR COMMUNAL MAINTENANCE

Erin K. Vearncombe

Keeping any group together requires rules. Many years ago now, when I was working on my master's degree, my supervisor invited me to join a small association of graduate students known simply as "Greek Group" – no definite article required. Every other week this collection of students would travel to our supervisor's home, share a meal that he had prepared for us, and spend the evening translating ancient Greek inscriptions from across the Roman empire, mainly inscriptions relating to Greco–Roman associations. A Greco–Roman association was voluntary and private, and known by various names: in Greek, a *koinon*, *thiasos*, *eranos* or *synodos*, among other terms, and in Latin, a *collegium*. Like "Greek Group," association members were linked by a common bond such as shared occupation (wool-workers, for example, or gladiators, silversmiths, fishmongers, etc.); devotion to a particular deity (Sarapis, Zeus Hypsistos, Syrian Aphrodite); or common place of birth, origin, or kin (on a larger scale, a geographic location like Judea or Alexandria; on a smaller scale, a neighborhood association, or even a household association). Again, like us, members met at regular intervals, usually to share a meal, or to engage in other social activities such as festival observance, worship, burial of a fellow member, etc. Our social activities began with the meal, and continued with regulated and what you might call "ritual" translation: sitting around my supervisor's dining table, we moved around the circle of students translating one or two lines of Greek each, interspersed with approval (hopefully) and commentary (definitely) from our supervisor, who, as our leader, might be considered head of our association and group high priest.

The Greek used in these inscriptions, generally to preserve the rules and specific procedures for association meetings or to record honors given to an association member, looked different than the Greek many of us were used to from reading New Testament or other literary texts, and it took a while to see the patterns and get the hang of it. Still, many inscriptions presented particular challenges, and each

of the members of Greek Group dreaded being the one in the circle who ended up with the really difficult lines (like a bad version of a party game like musical chairs or spin-the-bottle). For one particular meeting, we were preparing a translation of an inscription from the Athens area dating to about 100 CE, detailing the regulations for discipline for a group of *eranistai*, an association who met primarily to share meals and honor the gods (in this case, the god Herakles; *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum* 31:122). The rule of this association began as follows (following my 2006 Greek Group translation, with acknowledgment given to my supervisor and intrepid graduate colleagues):

> For good fortune! When Titus Flavius Konon was archon [civic leader] and the priest of the consul Drusus, on the eighteenth of [the month of] Mounichion, it seemed good to the chief *eraniste* [*archeranistes*; head of the club], Marcus Aemillius Eucharistos of Paiania, of the assembly of those in the association of Herakles in Limnae [the Lakes or Marshes], to approve the following.[1]

After this fairly standard beginning, the rule goes on to list the various fines and penalties to be paid should members start a quarrel, continue a quarrel, steal money from club dues, etc., eventually transitioning into the instructions concerning the association sacrifice and shared meal.

   The instructions for the meal presented me with the particular challenge of this translation. Here are the lines I was dreading most, praying they did not fall on me, as we translated around our circle:

> *kai tous elogistas omnuein auton te ton Heraklēn kai Dēmētra ka[i] Korēn klērousthai de tēs hēmeras hekastēs epi ta krea anthrōpous duō homoiōs kai epi tous streptous anthrōpous duō.*
>
> *(from lines 30–33)*

> and the auditors shall swear by Herakles himself and [by] Demeter and Kore, and each day let two people be appointed by lot to be in charge of the meat and likewise two people for the …

"For the …"? For the what, exactly? I was about to be exposed to the association of graduate students as a fraud, since I was pretty sure that two people were supposed to be appointed to oversee the distribution of fritters – fritters as in, yes, doughnuts. Pastries! There was no way an ancient association could have rules regarding the distribution of *pastries*.

   Of course, as we moved around the circle, those lines loomed before me, and I was forced, tentatively and timidly, to suggest – well, if not doughnuts, which seemed ludicrous, at least pastries. "Let two men be appointed by lot each day to be in charge of the meat, and likewise, two men to be in charge of the pastries." I peeked sideways at my supervisor. "Good," was his reply. Good? Really? I had to

interject. "Really?" I asked. "They are talking about *pastries*?" "Looks like it," he stated simply. I was right! The Greek word used here, *streptos*, is used of pastry, but is more commonly used as an adjective to describe something pliant, something that can be twisted. The group decided on the more scholarly sounding translation of "rolls" – two men were appointed to oversee the distribution of the rolls at the dinner – but still, the point here is that this *law* for this association of Herakles-devotees included regulations for the proper distribution of pastries. Happy to be affirmed by the group, I was also increasingly curious: why would a regulation be required for the handing-out of pastries?

Putting the question: how to interpret the distribution of doughnuts?

That meeting was a decade ago now, but my interest in the question has remained the same, supported by research into additional association regulations. This particular inscription, *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum* 31, number 122, is a good example of the type of detail an interpreter might expect to find in an association regulation. Fines were commonly levied against members who caused disputes, continued disputes, or were verbally abusive towards association officials. Shoving members aside to access a more honorable place at the table was also subject to fines. An entrance fee was often required; if a member had not paid the fee, he could be expelled from the meal, or from the association entirely (using the interesting language of expulsion of being *exeranos*, literally "outside the association" – the person becomes an exeranist). A similar but better-known inscription, the 164/65 CE rule of the *Iobacchoi*, a group of devotees of Bacchus, offers even more detail regarding its meal practice:

> And in the meeting (*stibas*), no one is permitted neither to sing,
> nor to make a disturbance, nor to applaud; but with
> all orderly behavior (*good conduct*) and decorum
> let (members) say and do their parts, as
> the priest or the head of the Bacchic devotees commands…(lines 63 – 67)
> And if anyone begins a fight or someone is disorderly
> or sits in someone else's seat or insults
> or abuses someone, let the one who was abused
> or insulted produce who of
> the devotees of Bacchus (*the Iobacchoi*) as sworn witnesses,
> (swearing) that they heard the insult or abuse…(lines 72 – 78)
> And if someone should come to blows, let the one who
> was struck report (the incident) to the priest or the vice-priest,
> and let (the priest or vice-priest) call a meeting, and
> let the devotees of Bacchus judge by vote
> with the priest presiding. Let the offender be handed over for the penalty
> that he not be permitted to enter (the assembly) for a time, as long as
> it seems

good/appropriate, and let him pay a fine, up to twenty-five silver denarii.
And let the same penalty be applied to
the one who is beaten and does not go to the priest or to
the head of the Bacchic devotees, but instead brings a charge with
the public
courts. And the penalty shall be the same for the officer in charge of order
(the *eukosmos*) if he does not expel those who fight…(lines 84–95)
(Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno anteriores [=IG II²] 1368)

The purpose of reproducing these short sections of the much longer inscription is
to illustrate the kinds of conduct expected and prohibited at association gatherings.
While, sadly, the *Iobacchoi* did not eat (or at least, regulate the distribution of) pas-
tries, meetings were clearly supposed to involve specific interactions and behaviors.
Given that this inscription was carved into a column right in the group's meeting
place, visible to all members, no one could claim ignorance regarding acceptable
conduct. To extend my earlier question, therefore: why were such specific, detailed,
and lengthy descriptions of association life necessary? Did fights really break out all
the time? Did people steal one another's seats? Why were these regulations impor-
tant? How were they meaningful?

I have a couple of answers to these questions, but the answer I want to focus on
here concerns (given the subject matter of this chapter) boundary maintenance. Once
entry into a group like a voluntary association was successfully performed, staying
within the group required ritual work, though ritual here may not be as obvious, or
as "sexy," as those concerning initiation. As stated earlier, discipline and regulation are
required to keep a group bonded, to support group cohesion. The maintenance of
group identity – the policing of boundaries and the creation of bonds between group
members – involved rituals that restored or defined group wholeness and subsequent
holiness. Greco–Roman association regulations deal with everyday life, with the rou-
tine, ordinary activities of these groups, but it is these very everyday practices, activities,
and actions we might think of as casual, unimportant, or uninteresting, such as eating
a meal or getting dressed in the morning, that were central to the ritual practice of
ancient groups, whether an association of merchants or of Christ-adherents. As this
chapter continues, I will explore the ways in which rituals involving dining and dress
in particular worked to foster group cohesion and deal with potential threats to com-
munity. Voluntary associations, ancient clubs organized around commonalities of work,
religion, or ethnicity, provide us with particularly rich evidence pertaining to group
identity, evidence that can help the contemporary reader make sense of what we see,
for example, in Paul's instructions to the Christian community at Corinth regarding
dining practices or the criticism of women's adornment in 1 Timothy and 1 Peter.

Meals, morality, and boundary maintenance

Group cohesion, the creation and maintenance of social bonds between members,
depends largely on the creation and maintenance of disposition: the permission or

prohibition of behaviors, I would argue, results in the cultivation of attitude and inclination. Routine behaviors result in ways of being, certain socially developed attitudes and moral positions. Boundary maintenance comes down to *minding manners*, essentially: as certain behaviors and interactions are either validated or punished, honored or fined, certain ways of being are established that work to develop correct attitudes towards group members, attitudes such as respect for social or group status, humility or modesty, generosity, feelings of friendship, reciprocal responsibility, etc. These attitudes are developed not through specialized, extraordinary observances or rituals, but through repeated performances of everyday or normal activities, activities such as sharing a meal. Boundary maintenance is not a superficial category, interested in the external policing of bodies or behaviors; these behaviors are significant because of their internal consequences, their impact on the moral attitudes of group adherents. The forging of bonds, relationships of varying degrees or kinds of reciprocity, in a sense creates the bonded, creates the group member.

The meal practices of ancient associations have not tended to figure in scholarly conversations regarding morality. As Wayne Meeks states in *The Moral World of the First Christians*,

> there is little evidence that cults undertook to establish or reinforce moral rules or to instruct their adherents in ethical principles or rules for behavior. Such instructions belong rather … to the schools of philosophy and rhetoric, and to the public discourse by philosophers and orators. The Christian groups did concern themselves with the behavior of their members, from the beginning; in this respect, it has been suggested that they have looked more like a school than a cult.
>
> *(Meeks 1986, 114)*

Were associations truly disinterested in establishing and maintaining codes of moral conduct, though? I am not interested so much in the question of whether or not early Christian groups *were* associations, but I am curious about the morality question – if Christ groups were interested in morality, and this is not a contested point, it is worth investigating instances where moral instruction seems to be at work, and comparing this evidence with data from association regulations in particular. I would suggest that the regular direction of investigation here – looking at associations can help us to understand early Christ groups, or help us to generate critical questions about Christ groups – can be reversed. Perhaps Christ groups can help us to understand, or to interrogate, ancient associations. Early Christian ritual life was not separate from, or totally distinct or different from, the ritual life of other Greco–Roman groups; Christianity did not emerge from a vacuum. The reward of this work is therefore a larger, fuller awareness of the dynamics of group cohesion.

I am not the first to examine moral discourse in the association/Christ group context – as usual, when I start a research project, I find that John S. Kloppenborg (my MA and PhD supervisor) has anticipated me. In a recent essay Kloppenborg notes, "a prevailing ancient and modern caricature of associations is that their

principal activities were dining and drinking, with the latter outweighing the former. Yet," he continues,

> more careful study of the role of associations has emphasized the degree to which they functioned, whether intentionally or not, as locations of socialization and integration of subelite persons into the values and practices of the cities in which they were found.
>
> *(Kloppenborg 2013, 216)*

Kloppenborg builds on the work of Andrew Monson, specifically Monson's contention that instructions regarding acceptable behavior worked to create "networks of trust." Monson asserts,

> By joining an association, members signal to others that they are trustworthy and share the values of their peers. The rules of associations represent agreed norms of ethical behavior and embody shared values. The effect of writing the rules down and enforcing them is to transform informal norms shared by the group into institutions that constrain behavior … the rules of associations institutionalize the boundary between trust networks and ordinary social networks.
>
> *(Monson 2006, 232–33)*

Monson is specifically interested in the fines levied by associations: particularly high fines for adultery, followed by insults, violence, or failure to assist fellow association members, would, according to Monson, eliminate untrustworthy members, creating greater group trust and solidarity and functioning even as a recruitment strategy; Kloppenborg states,

> A social setting in which members would rely on mutual support and where they were protected from various threats represented a significant advantage for living. But such an ethos surely functioned as a point of attraction to those outside the group and thus, an indirect strategy of recruitment.
>
> *(Kloppenborg 2013, 227)*

Trustworthiness, which I interpret as moral credibility and reciprocal responsibility, played a role in group membership at several levels.

Kloppenborg calls for closer attention specifically to the language of association decrees in order to understand the role that moral demands might play in their small group activities. His focus is specifically on the recruitment of members of associations and the language of vetting (Gk. *dokimazein*). A decree of an association from Bendis dating to the late fourth century BCE, for example, reads:

> So that there may be as many orgeones of the sanctuary as possible, it is permitted for anyone who so wishes to contribute … drachmae to become a member of the sanctuary and to be inscribed on the stele. Let the orgeones

[generally translated as "members of a religious association"] vet (dokimazein) those who are to be inscribed on the stele, and hand over the names of those approved (tōn dokimasthentōn) to the secretary.

(IG II² 1361; quoted in Kloppenborg 2013, 217)

Similarly, the *Iobacchoi* decree mentioned earlier reads,

It is not allowed for anyone to become an *Iobacchos* unless he first register with the priest the customary notice and is vetted (*dokimasthē*) by a vote of the *Iobacchoi* if he appears to be worthy and suitable for the *Baccheion* (following Kloppenborg's translation).

Because this language of vetting, *dokimasia* and *dokimazein*, seems to occur in situations requiring moral probity, specifically – usually when someone has failed to meet moral requirements – Kloppenborg concludes that vetting in associations involved the testing of moral standing as a requirement for membership (Kloppenborg 2013, 219). As another example, one had to be "good" (*agathos*) to enter an association of *eranistai* in Athens in the second century CE, and "pure" and "pious."

Kloppenborg's work involves entrance regulations specifically, and he goes on to examine the language of purity in relation to entrance, connecting the "attention paid to the moral state of members of associations" to "a shift in the late Hellenistic period toward moralizing requirements in the entrance regulations of some cultic sites" (Kloppenborg 2013, 220). Entrance into temples often specified a "pure soul" or "pure thoughts," a "pure mind," or approaching the deity or meeting place used to honor the deity (temple or otherwise) with "simplicity" or "a simple soul." Kloppenborg cites, among other texts and inscriptions, a regulation from Delos dating to 116/5 BCE regarding entrance into a sanctuary of Zeus Kynthios (a geographical designation – Zeus of Mt. Kynthos, on the island of Delos) and Athena Kynthia (*Lois sacrées des cités grecques: supplément. École française d'Athènes* 59). Apparently, the regulation had to be re-inscribed after an original stele was damaged; Nikephoros, a priest in the temple, re-issues the rule for moral conduct:

Enter into the sanctuary
of Zeus Kynthios
and of Athena Kynthia
with pure (*or clean, kathara*) hands and soul,
having (*wearing, echontas*) a white garment (*esthēta leukēn*),
barefoot (*anypodetous*), having kept oneself pure (*agneuontas*)
from women and meat,
and bringing in neither
nor a little key, nor
a ring made of iron, nor
a belt, nor a pouch,
nor instruments of violence,

doing nothing that is forbidden,
but rather complete the sacrifices and
sacrifice with good omens (*kallierein*) according what derives from the
fathers (*kata ta patria*).

Entrance into and participation in associations required vetting or public acknowledgment of purity, though purity here seems to involve both more typical dispositions like "being purified of women and meat," with more surprising practical behaviors like wearing white and not wearing a belt. Why should one not bring in a little key? Why does not wearing a belt increase one's purity?"

Related to purity is the language of intention. A domestic (household) association of Zeus in Philadelphia dating to the late Hellenistic period requires all entrants, men and women, free person and slave, to participate in the life of the association with good intentions:

> When entering into this household, let men (and women?), free people and persons of the household (i.e., slaves) swear by all (?) the gods that they do not know of any stratagem/act of deceit against a man (or a woman?), nor of any drug harmful to people, nor do they know of (or use?) harmful spells/charms, or love charms, or drugs to induce abortion, or contraceptives, or any other thing fatal to children, nor will they advise or connive with another. (Members) are not to abstain in any way from being well-inclined towards this household (de mēden eunoein tōi oikōi tōide), and if anyone does or plots these things, (members) are neither to permit nor pass over them in silence, but declare (these things) and defend (themselves/the association against them).
>
> *(Tituli Asiae Minoris V 1539, lines 14–25)*

The key idea in this text is the reference to being "well-inclined towards this household," being of good intention, demonstrating goodwill. Similarly, at the conclusion of the inscription, another call to goodwill is made, here on the part of the goddess Angdistis:

> may she create good (?) thoughts in men and in women, (free persons and) slaves, in order that they might comply with (obey, or imitate) the things which are written here. And during the sacrifices which happen monthly and (yearly?), let those men and women who trust themselves (or have confidence in themselves) touch this inscription on which the precepts (?) of the god are written.
>
> *(lines 52–57)*

Members are to think good thoughts; this is how they are to trust in themselves. This trust, this goodwill, is ensured through the touching of the association inscription on a regular basis – the action is meant to assert or reinforce disposition. When entering a meeting, or when participating in a major group event, members had

to reaffirm their moral standing, often through the touching of the inscription detailing the group's regulations and rules of conduct.

Theorizing boundary maintenance

What happens once one has entered the meeting-place? What happens when one becomes a member, when one has paid the dues and is waiting eagerly for the distribution of pastries to commence? Here I want to look not at the specifics of language, which will not solve my motivating problem, and not at the practices themselves, but actually at the connection between practice and text, between group activities and the regulations that structure these activities. Earlier, I quoted Monson's statement, "The effect of *writing the rules down* and *enforcing them* is to transform informal norms shared by the group into institutions that constrain behavior" (Monson 2006, 232–33, emphasis added). The connection between written rule, inscribed *nomos*, and physical practice is essential. Here is where my own contribution to this ongoing conversation comes in: as we know, communal meals were often the heart of ancient group life and membership, and many associations presented members with particularly detailed regulations around meal practice. Meal practice concerned much more than simple table manners; Monson's "institutions that constrain behavior" begs for further nuance. Association practices, particularly meals, *aimed at the creation and maintenance of particular moral dispositions among group members*. It is the creation of these moral dispositions that facilitated group cohesion, that kept group boundaries intact. Applying Talal Asad's theory of ritual from his 1993 work *Genealogies of Religion*, specifically his chapter "Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual," enables me to argue that the prescribed performance of meals aimed at the acquisition of specific moral attitudes and behavioral traits that set association practice apart from broader social norms.

A discussion of ritual, in many ways, parallels a discussion of religion; we can trace scholarly discussions of ritual the same way we trace those concerning religion. Asad's framing questions, "When did we, as anthropologists begin to speak of 'ritual'? And why did we decide to speak of it in the way we do now?" (Asad 1993, 55) have also, of course, been asked of religion. Asad's interest is in checking out whether or not we actually recognize a ritual when we see one: "Every ethnographer will probably recognize a ritual when he or she sees one, because ritual is (is it not?) symbolic activity as opposed to the instrumental behavior of everyday life" (Asad 1993, 55). We know from the question – "is it not?" – what the answer will be. Ritual as symbolic behavior – "a type of routine behavior that symbolizes or expresses something and, as such, relates differentially to individual consciousness and social organization … it is … a type of practice that is interpretable as standing for some further verbally definable, but tacit, event" (Asad 1993, 57) – only became "a thing" in the twentieth century, after Tylor, Mauss, and Frazer entered the academic scene. Before this time, ritual referred to text, to a script, to written regulations for practice and behavior. Ritual referred to practical, technically effective behavior, as encoded in textual instruction. Asad cites the *Encyclopedia Britannica* from Edinburgh dating to 1771, which defines ritual as a "book directing the order

and manner to be observed in celebrating religious ceremonies, and performing divine service in a particular church, diocese, order, or the like" (Asad 1993, 56). Ritual as enacted symbol, as representational behavior that requires observation and subsequent interpretation, is a thoroughly modern idea – that is Asad's position. Ritual has a more primary definition of text to be read and performed. Asad's most important contribution to the understanding of ritual is presented as follows:

> If there are prescribed ways of performing liturgical services, then we can assume that there exists a requirement to master the proper performance of these services. Ritual is therefore directed at the apt performance of what is prescribed, something that depends on intellectual and practical disciplines but does not itself require decoding. In other words, apt performance involves not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority: it presupposes no obscure meanings, but rather the formation of physical and linguistic skills.
>
> *(Asad 1993, 62)*

Ritual is not necessarily about mystical meaning, about action that points outside of itself to a spiritual or other world. The performance of ritual, as it involves body and mind, action and disposition, ends in the development of certain physical and mental techniques. In essence, the regulation of ritual aims at the *acquisition* of *ability*.

Asad goes on to apply this theory of ritual to medieval Christian practice and the concept of moral discipline, examining the regulations provided by the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. The Rule allows for the disciplined formation of the Christian self: "In the *Rule* all prescribed practices, whether they had to do with the proper ways of eating, sleeping, working, and praying … are aimed at developing virtues that are put 'to the service of God'" (Asad 1993, 63). Ritual was not a separate category of behavior for monastic adherents to the *Rule*, but was part of this behavior, *was* this behavior; things that the body did, practically, repeated over time, enabled the development of moral capability.

Ancient associations provide us with, I would argue, similar scripts – similar ritual manuals. Ilias Arnaoutoglou maintains that text – script, regulation, *nomos* – was essential to the existence of the association:

> if cult was one of the main functions of associations, then the stipulations of that cult could well have been the founding act of the group. In other words, a document prescribing cult activities was sufficient to form the cornerstone of a cult group.
>
> *(Arnaoutoglou 1998, 71)*

A set of regulations is required to structure collective behaviors. Returning to the *Iobacchoi* inscription mentioned earlier, it is interesting to note that after some brief orienting data regarding the date and names of current officials, the statutes of the association are read aloud and approved, and the association then, it seems, shouts

that the regulations be rendered into text for all to see: "Revive the statutes!" they apparently cried, "Inscribe the statues on the stele!" (lines 15–17 of the inscription). The president puts the question: "To whomever it seems good that the statutes that have been read out should be ratified and inscribed on a stele, raise your hand." Everyone raised his hand (lines 17–24). Inscriptions provide us with written records that "direct the order and manner to be observed" (Asad 1993, 56) in association life – most commonly, in the available evidence, in association meal practice, more specifically. Here is the *ritual*, as it were; here we have the script that guides practice, the practice that guides ability and attitude.

   This argument builds on Philip Harland's important assertion of the importance of religion in association life and practice. In his book *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations*, Harland notes that the religious purposes of associations have been downplayed in scholarship (much like their moral purposes), arguing instead that

> all types of associations served a variety of interconnected social, religious, and funerary functions for their members. The evidence strongly suggests the importance of honoring gods and goddesses within associations of all types. Overall, these functions helped to provide members with a sense of belonging and identity.
>
> *(Harland 2003, 55)*

When it comes to the ancient Mediterranean world in general, and association activity in particular, categories like "social," "religious," and "funerary" are not easily distinguishable – and we, as contemporary interpreters, should not necessarily try to distinguish them. Responding to the arguments of M. P. Nilsson, Ramsay MacMullen (1974, 1981), and Nicholas R. E. Fisher (1988a, 1988b) that downplay the religious dimensions of association life or privilege the social over the religious – Nilsson, for example, declares that associations "under the pretext of honoring some god after whom the association was named, assembled in order to enjoy themselves and to feast … these people were not in earnest about religion" (Nilsson 1957, 64) – Harland amasses evidence from both text and image, inscription and relief, to demonstrate that honoring deities was serious religious business in association life. Ancient religious practice, of course, cannot be separated from broader social life; there was no separate category of religion as we understand religion and religiosity in our contemporary contexts. For example, a monument from Panormos (northwestern Asia Minor) dedicated to Zeus Hypsistos by a member of the association in his name depicts Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo in relief, holding libation bowls; the deities are the most prominent figures in the relief, larger, carved in more depth and detail. Six association members recline underneath the deities, sharing a meal; below the members are entertainers, a flute-player, a dancer, a percussionist, and a man mixing the bowl of wine. Harland uses examples like this one to make a point about the fusion of the social and religious life of the association, creating a "picture of associations eating and drinking as they gather together under the protection or even in the presence of the deities whom they honor" (Harland 2003, 59).

Reliefs such as this one are especially important in understanding association life, as they depict what we generally cannot see in text. Inscriptions "rarely state what was taken for granted as customary practice," notes Harland (Harland 2003, 62), so we might not be able to tell just how interconnected religious life was with sociability, status, and solidarity. Religion was embedded in the network of social relations that made up ancient Mediterranean life, so we cannot always see it in an honorary inscription for a benefactor, for example, or guidelines for meal practice. It is not visible, and, therefore, much more difficult to theorize. I am extending this argument and applying it, within the discourse of religion, to ritual. We do not necessarily recognize a ritual when we see one, because it is not necessarily symbolic activity, as opposed to the instrumental behavior of everyday life. I am arguing that it *is* the instrumental behavior of everyday life. I want to make ritual, in the consideration of ancient group life, visible, and therefore also *theorizable*, in a new way.

Meals in an early Christian context

Scholarship on early Christianity has never hesitated to associate morality with Paul's regulations for the distribution and consumption of food. As Rachel McRae maintains, for example,

> Paul is … able to propose radical changes to the Corinthian meal ritual in order to establish new social and behavioral patterns that reflect the values of humility, mutual up-building, and love that Jesus taught. In effect, Paul uses the meal ritual to create a new Christian social identity.

Further, Paul "encourages the teachings of Jesus about equality, humility, and mutuality instead of hierarchy, aggrandizement, and competition" (McRae 2011, 166). I am not suggesting here that associations were not interested in questions of status – certainly, honor and status were hugely important, which we see in regulations concerning seating in the dining room, for example – but I do not think that Paul's regulations for the meal are "radical changes" when considered in context: Paul uses meal practice to encourage the development of certain moral dispositions – humility, mutuality – in a way that is strikingly similar to association practice. Everyday ritual activities, social actions structured through written rule and regulation, enforced by group officials and members, were fundamentally concerned with good intention, with the development of bonds that made group members feel responsible for one another, and therefore firmly connected.

An obstacle to McRae's argument has been the question of elected officials in the Corinthian community; association practice was highly hierarchical as, it seems, was the structure of the Corinthian Christ group. Richard Last has argued persuasively that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:19, is advocating for the election of group officials who are more competent than the current leadership in regulating member behavior. Officers are responsible for group behavior, so divisions or factions – expressed verbally or physically – signaled problems with group leadership

(2013). Last maintains that the election of officials in 1 Cor. 11:19 that follows immediately after the mention of divisions between members in 11:18 (18: "For, in the first place, when you come together in the assembly [*ekklēsia*], I hear that there are divisions [*schismata*] among you, and I believe it, in part"; 19: "for indeed it is necessary that there be factions [*haireseis*] among you, so that those who are notable [*hoi dokimoi*; esteemed, trustworthy, approved, acceptable] among you might become known [*phaneroi*]") makes sense given both the prevalence of divisions (*schismata*) in Greco–Roman associations and the significance of elected officials within associations in dealing with these *schismata*:

> Elections represent, in Paul's mind, the solution to banquet schismata, which amounts to an accusation that the current leaders with responsibilities over food distribution are at fault for the schismata. Given the involvement of officers in factious behavior throughout ancient Mediterranean association banquets, it is not surprising to find them involved in the Corinthian schismata, and at fault, in Paul's mind.
>
> *(Last 2013, 373–74)*

Rituals both presuppose regulations and authority: "Rites as apt performances presuppose codes – in the regulative sense as opposed to the semantic – and people who evaluate and teach them" (Asad 1993, 62). If we read the Corinthian regulations for meals as working towards moral outcomes, we can use the Corinthian Christ group as something "good to think with" when it comes to associations (rather than the other way around, as has tended to be the scholarly habit). Why can associations not use meal practice to cultivate morality, too? We need to think more broadly when it comes to the dynamics of group cohesion and boundary maintenance.

While the morality of early Jesus followers is already a much-explored topic, discussion of the morality of association members, a morality constructed according to the rules of association leadership, will provide a much stronger foundation for conversation between the two, for mutual interrogation. We are pretty clear on the function of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians as constructing a specific moral disposition for participants, as is Paul himself on this particular point:

> For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk … What should I say to you? … Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.
>
> *(1 Cor 11:21–22, 28–29)*

The meal is meant to construct the "genuine" participant in the eyes of Paul, in the more common translation of *phaneroi* in 1 Cor 11:19, or, following Last, "persons of distinction" (Last 2013, 379). Given the similarity between these contexts – the Corinthian Christ-group and the ancient association – our reading of 1

Corinthians can aid our reading of association regulations, which in turn aids our assessment of group maintenance. We have the Lord's Supper, accepted as ritual. In the case of associations, we also see prescribed ways of performing routinized, repeated behaviors; the written prescription assumes the required mastery of proper performance. Performance, following Asad, is not simply technical, nor is it necessarily symbolic, but physical and intellectual, as the training of the body does help to shape disposition and worldview. "Table manners are rituals because they are the way in which it is commonly agreed that eating *should* be performed," to quote Margaret Visser in *The Rituals of Dinner* (1991, 31), but this eating has a practical purpose: this eating is connected to proper moral attitude. Proper moral attitude – feeling well-intentioned towards another human being – keeps a group of human beings together.

From doughnuts to dress

It is my contention in this chapter that the rituals of boundary maintenance involve the everyday practices that are difficult to distinguish from routine, regular ways of being in and interacting with the world. Eating is one such practice; getting dressed is another. In addition to regulations concerning meals and the proper way to eat communally, we also find association regulations concerning dress practices and the proper way to wear garments when with others. Dress is, after all, an essentially social practice – no matter how much we might wish to think that we dress only to please ourselves, our clothing and adornment of the body is our primary tool for social communication. The same was true in the ancient Mediterranean, to an even more heightened degree. I will now turn my focus to the use of clothing and dress as ritual boundary maintenance.

Ritual, following Asad, involves repeated physical action, following an authoritative script, that results, through repetition, in the acquisition of certain abilities and the formation of disposition. Of all human practices, dress lends itself best to repetition, as none of us can leave our private, domestic spaces each day without participating in some form of dress. As Joanne Entwistle asserts, we are not just bodies, but *dressed* bodies:

> Conventions of dress transform flesh into something recognizable and meaningful to a culture and are also the means by which bodies are made "decent," appropriate and acceptable within specific contexts. Dress does not merely serve to protect our modesty and does not simply *reflect* a natural body or, for that matter, a given identity; it *embellishes* the body, the materials commonly used adding a whole array of meanings to the body that would otherwise not be there.
>
> *(Entwistle 2000, 323–24)*

Dress is the primary way we make sense of ourselves and others, the way we locate ourselves and one another in our specific social worlds. We can articulate

conformity or resistance, support or subversion through clothing, intentionally or unintentionally.

There are certain implicit rules of dress we follow every day, whether we are aware of these rules or not; I do not show up to teach my classes in sweatpants, for example, as I somehow know that this form of dress would be unacceptable. There are other rules of dress, though, that are imposed explicitly upon us in certain situations, and these explicit rules can be considered under Asad's rubric for ritual. Explicit rules for the appearance of the body – dress codes – are often enacted with the goal of shaping the behavior and constructing the disposition of the wearer. Readers who have had to wear a school uniform at some point in their lives will probably be familiar with this idea: if you had to wear a white collared shirt without a logo, for example, you might have thought more consciously about the visual influence and impact of social class; if you had to wear a short pleated skirt every day, you probably learned certain ways of walking and sitting in that skirt, ways of moving your body that required you to learn the "laws" of contemporary femininity (see Happel 2013). As Craik declares,

> uniforms are all about control, not only of the social self but also of the inner self and its formation … Wearing a uniform properly – understanding and obeying rules about the uniform-in-practice – turning the garments into communicative statements – is more important than the items of clothing and decoration themselves. (Craik 2003, 128)

What we wear every day, as repeated practice, actually constructs our orientation to the world, constructs our physical, social, and psychological ways of being in the world.

Uniforms are a very specific category of dress, and I do not want to suggest here that cultures of the ancient Mediterranean participated in some form of uniform dress practice. We do have access to regulations, however – specific rules for what could and could not be worn in specific situations – that suggest that dress, like meal practice, was used to construct and maintain group boundaries. Following these rules on a reiterative basis, or, in other words, maintaining a certain ritual of dress, would have worked to develop "correct" attitudes of the wearers.

One rather famous rule, or ritual script, will help to make this argument clear. This rule belongs not to an association, but rather to a so-called mystery cult; it is a first-century BCE inscription that would have been located at the entrance to the sanctuary of the Great Goddess at Andania (on the Peloponnese in ancient Greece), published as *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd ed. 736 (translation in Meyer 1987, 51–9). (It should be noted that the inscription includes regulations for a communal meal, again troubling the distinction between association and cult.) The inscription is very long (194 lines!) and very detailed and includes instructions for the sacred procession, sacrifices, collecting revenue from members/participants, punishments for various offences, and access to the group's water source. A long section concerns clothing, and wearers are broken down into many distinct categories: sacred

men (*hieroi*) and sacred women (*hierai gynaikes*, or female officers of the group), recently initiated men and women, initiated men and women, free adult women, girls, female slaves, and then a general category for all women. Each category of wearer must wear certain items and is prohibited from wearing others. Initiated men, for example, must wear white garments and go barefoot; different categories of women could wear different kinds of outer garments, with varying kinds of borders or decorative elements, worth a maximum amount of money only. A free adult woman, for example, was required to wear a linen tunic called a *chitōn* and a cloak called a *himation* worth a maximum of 100 drachmas; a female slave could wear a garment called a *kalasēris* or a *sindonites* and a *himation*, the *himation* worth a maximum of only 50 drachmas. No woman could wear cosmetics or hair accessories: no gold, rouge, face makeup (the equivalent of foundation), hairbands, braided or plaited hair; no shoes either, unless they were of felt or sacrificial leather (see lines 15–26). Anyone in violation of these rules was subject to punishment, and the offensive items of dress would be donated to the gods.

While the Andanian rule includes regulations for men, the detailed focus on women has suggested to scholars that women might have been particularly disruptive to group order. (Most surviving sanctuary inscriptions focus on male dress rather than female dress, perhaps because women were prohibited from entering certain sanctuaries; see, for example, the Hymn of Isyllos, *SEG* 46 375, lines 17–19; *SEG* 4 681; the inscription described above regarding the sanctuary of Zeus Kynthios and Athena Kynthia implies that only men entered.) The regulations for this group revolve around markers of status: women of higher rank – free women, female officers, initiated women – could wear garments that were worth more money, and could wear garments that included a decorative border of a certain width and kind. These status markers were highly visible, displayed on and through dress. Alicia Batten has argued that women used dress as a means to communicate honor and status in the ancient world because they had no other means to do so at their disposal; women did not have access to masculine forms of honor, yet still desired this most coveted social currency. While ancient male writers celebrated the unadorned women, accusing women who were too ostentatious or elaborate in their dress of the vice of *luxuria* (excess, extravagance, overindulgence or immoderation), actual women, Batten writes,

> apparently enjoyed wearing and doing those things that would signal their high status to the community, and perhaps garner admiration from other women … the wearing of beautiful clothes and expensive jewellery would underline their status in the society of women, and equip them with an economic power that could have ensured a certain degree of autonomy.
>
> *(Batten 2009, 497)*

Expensive clothing and fine jewelry was a limited good, so having and displaying this dress was a competitive practice, especially among women.

Batten suggests that the Andanian rule might have this concern about competition and the vice of *luxuria* as the baseline for the restrictions on women's clothing.

If women were competing with one another to display their honor through visible wealth, that competition could have disrupted group interactions not just among women, but between men as well, as a wife guilty of *luxuria* brought dishonor to a husband. Batten writes, "if women were permitted to wear such things [gold, elaborate hair, fine clothing], they might continually pursue more and more adornment possibly to the financial and social detriment of the association" (Batten 2009, 496). Batten uses the Andanian regulations to interpret two difficult early Christian texts, 1 Timothy 2:9 ("Likewise also, women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair, nor gold, nor pearls, nor expensive clothing") and 1 Peter 3:3 ("Do not adorn yourself externally, braiding the hair, putting on gold jewellery, the putting on of garments") – again, no gold or braided hair allowed, and limitations on costly garments. If women were becoming "problems" in these groups, whether through their assertion of their own economic status or power, through competition with one another (a stereotypical view of women's interactions, to be sure, and perhaps an anachronistic one too, since gender functioned very differently in the ancient Mediterranean world than in our own contemporary contexts) or through some other behavior or activity, these regulations that limit female adornment, following Batten, "limit the women's ability to convey their status and honour, while increasing or at least preserving male honour and status" and also preserving, by extension (so runs the implication of the argument) group harmony, women becoming less visible as a result (Batten 2009, 501).

It is possible that dress codes were a means to prevent women from making distinctions between themselves based on social status and honor, or potentially, on a very basic level, to foster group identity through a shared "uniform":

> unique dress attached to specific cultural groups … can function to insulate group members from outsiders, while bonding the members to each other. Normative behaviour within the culture reaffirms loyalty to the group and can be evidenced by the wearing of a uniform type of attire.
>
> *(Arthur 1999, 3–4)*

There is a very simple and fundamental way in which wearing the same form of dress as others bonds the wearer to that group (for example, like when I wear a Princeton sweatshirt to a Princeton soccer game. I would not feel so included if I wore a Harvard sweatshirt – I would not dream of wearing such an item!). On a more interesting and complex level, though, these written codes could have enabled visual distinction between group members, male and female, and the gods. Statues of deities were usually dressed in colorful garments and elaborate jewelry, and limitations on colors and decorations could have worked to communicate difference between the human and the divine. Building on the work of Stéphanie Paul (2013), Cecilie Brøns maintains that the more elaborate dress of religious officials (priests and priestesses), including items of dress identified with specific deities (wearing wreaths or crowns from a plant associated with a deity, for example, like

ivy for Dionysos or white poplar for Herakles), would have separated ordinary participant from sanctioned leader, and participant from god. Brøns states,

> the dress worn by priests or priestesses was part of an identification process between them and the divinity whom they served. The cultic practitioner may even have been viewed as being transformed into a divine vessel of the spirits – a transformation made manifest by changes in dress.
>
> *(Brøns 2016, ch. 12)*

Dress in this context would not have served a symbolic role, pointing beyond itself to truth or meaning, but rather would have created that meaning in and of itself.

Thinking about group boundaries, I would like to extend the argument of Brøns by stating that the maintenance of a distinction between group member, group leader, and group divinity through dress is ritual in terms of the use of a rule, enacted repeatedly and consistently, to establish social and moral positioning. The physical enactment of group hierarchy (human–human and human–divine) through the visual, material means of dress structures the orientation to the divine, the focus of group activity; repeated physical performance translates into personal worldview. Following Daniel Miller, "when fibres, fabrics and ways of wearing are the medium for one's relationships to other people and to the gods, we cannot have 'cloth' and 'religion' we can only have the materiality of cosmology" (Miller 2005, 7). Getting dressed a certain way before visiting the sanctuary or participating in a group activity – a meal, a procession – primed your body for a certain kind of movement, identified you with a certain category of people (group official, group member; woman, man; slave, free), located you with respect to divinity, allowed you to participate in certain activities, prohibited you from others. Wearing the wrong thing would subject you to punishment, exclude you from the group, remove your clothing from your body, see it dedicated to new owners, the gods. Dress practices work fundamentally, essentially, to locate the self relative to the other, not simply in social, physical space but also, through repeated practice, to personal, intellectual space.

Conclusion: daily practice and communal boundary maintenance

The rituals of group boundary maintenance are not flashy. They are not mysterious, like many initiations, nor aggressive, nor a unique form of experience in any way, really. They are basic, fundamental practices of everyday existence, such as eating and wearing clothes. Ancient groups – associations, cults, collections of textile dyers, assemblies of Jesus-followers – drew up endless, seemingly banal rules for group life and practice that functioned to properly orient behavior inwardly, toward the center of that group. Minding your manners was of incredible importance; the longer the pastries, those delicious apple fritters (as I probably erroneously imagine them) were distributed in that particular way, the more solidified, materialized, the

result of that distribution: a particular group hierarchy, a particular orientation of status, a particular belief about or principle of honor, reciprocity, responsibility. To whomever it seems good now to end this argument and go and get themselves a doughnut, raise your hand.

Note

1   While this translation is the one I produced for Greek Group in 2006, similar translations for this text and others referenced in this chapter have been produced by former generations of Greek Group members, many of which are now included in one or more of the following volumes: Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg 2012; Kloppenborg and Ascough 2011; and Harland 2014.

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6

EARLY CHRISTIAN FUNERARY RITUAL

Nicola Hayward

Walking along the Via Latina, at the corner of Via Cesare Baronio in the southwest corner of Rome, one would never know that just a few feet below street level are some of the most striking frescoes of pagan and early Christian funerary art. Nor is there any visible street signage to let the passerby know they are walking over roughly 400 of Rome's early Christian and pagan residents, now deceased and buried below. In early July 2012, I met with Evelino Zinobile, who is a ninth-generation *fossor*, or grave digger. After introductions, Evelino began to dismantle what looked like an ordinary manhole, in the shape of a large rectangle, revealing a series of steep steps that led down into the Via Latina catacomb. The catacomb is not a large catacomb in comparison to some of Rome's others, such as Callixtus, which stretches up to 20 kilometers and has four levels; in contrast, one could easily walk the Via Latina Catacomb from one end to the other in under ten minutes. What the Via Latina catacomb lacks in size, however, it more than makes up for in its frescoes, as it is one of the most densely and elaborately painted catacombs in Rome. Indeed, the beauty, quality, and sheer number of frescoes engulf the viewer. Its small size and intimacy aids in bringing the viewer into the images, rather than creating a distant, detached feeling, reminiscent of large art museums. This intimacy is further enhanced by the frescoes being *in situ*, coupled with minimal use of wall space for *loculi*, or small rectangle niches dug out of the wall's tufa used by Rome's innumerable poor, a feature more commonly found in the larger catacombs. Rather, the artists who painted the Via Latina decorated a vast area of the catacomb.

One of the main objectives, if not *the* main objective, of participants during annual funerary rituals is to memorialize the deceased. As a result, this chapter is concerned with how funerary rituals function in prompting memory of the deceased. In particular, I am concerned with the archeological features and visual images found in Rome's catacombs. These features and images are intriguing but their function is difficult to interpret. I estimate that by considering the ritual

use of the space, we gain an interpretive key for understanding their significance. Catacomb images function in commemorative ritual as mnemonic devices not only in the meaning in the material signs which cultivate remembrance, but also in the participants during the ritualized act of remembering when the community comes together during the annual commemorate festivals (Assman 2012, 38).

This chapter is a case study of a particular archeological site: the fresco of the Samaritan woman (hereafter SW) and a *tondo* portrait painted immediately above it in the arch in cubiculum F, found in the Via Latina catacomb in Rome (ca. 315–375). A picture of the frescoes is available at the following site – International Catacomb Society, "Via Latina Catacomb," http://www.catacombsociety.org/free-tour-of-the-via-latina-catacombs-on-sunday-march-20-2016/. The Via Latina catacomb provides an excellent point from which to examine how images function in a group context and with ritualized activity to promote the memory and social identity of the deceased person. The fresco of the SW with Jesus at Jacob's well (see John 4) is painted in cubiculum F, in the lunette (half-circle shaped back wall) of the arcosolium (arched recess). In her left hand, the SW holds a rope, which has an amphora at the end. At the same time, she points to Jesus with her right hand, a gesture that indicates speech (Zanker 1995, 268–69). Her gaze, along with her stance, both of which point towards Jesus, signifies the act of speech. A young, beardless Jesus is wearing a tunic, cloak, and sandals and stands facing the woman on the opposite side of the well. His gaze falls directly on the SW, while his left hand holds the folds of his cloak, with his right arm held out in the fashion of speech. Above them and in the center of the arch is a large tondo portrait of a woman, with her head tilted towards the left, allowing her gaze to fall directly on the SW. The direction and clarity of her eyes indicates to the viewer that she too is engaged in the dialogue between Jesus and the SW.

The above two factors – group context and ritualized activity – are important since the images, the ritual, and the group combine to generate and perpetuate meaning. In order to understand this particular site, we need to review not only Roman funerary practices but also the significance and influence of material culture such as Roman portraits. How these two frescoes interact with one another must also be considered in light of the Gospel of John 4:1–42, as it is likely the patron knew of the SW only from the gospel account, where she read it for herself or heard it read in a liturgical setting (see later in this chapter). I argue for the strong plausibility that the patron, whom I call Vilantia – following Nicola Denzey (2007, 25) – not only consciously chose the image of the SW, but also had herself portrayed in a tondo portrait in her burial chamber, and in doing so defined her own social identity and communal memory. The tondo evokes ancestor masks typical in elite Roman households. By appropriating the use of these masks in the form of a tondo, the deceased Vilantia situates herself in dialogue with both the SW and Jesus through the tondo's gaze, which is directed at them. This relationship raises questions about the patron Vilantia's significance to her community. If she was a community teacher and leader, why did she choose the SW to articulate these activities? What was her self-perception?

In contemporary society, most people reveal the bare minimum of information on their graves. In life, they often shun the idea of discussing death. Usually dying and death are isolated from family, managed by medical specialists and professional undertakers. In antiquity, however, the omnipresence of death made it culturally immediate and as a result an integral aspect of the Roman experience; high mortality rates meant that death was often up close and personal. Since death and dying were such common and public events, the way a person died was included in the list of items in summarizing the person's character as well as how they were to be remembered (Hope 2007, 39–40).

Not only was dying a good death considered to be important, but equally significant was the design and place of the deceased's tomb. Unlike modern society, in the Roman world people discussed their deaths: they specified how they wanted to be buried, what their tomb would look like, and who would take care of it and them (Petronius, *Satyricon* 71; Augustine, *Conf.* 9.11–12; Jerome, *Epist.* 108.28–30). They also told us about their lives on their graves: what they did, who betrayed them, where they were from, and how they wanted to be remembered. The divulging of their lives could be done by etching words onto gravestones, carving reliefs on sarcophagi, or painting frescoes on tombs. This information was not intended for the dead but for the living, so that the deceased might not be forgotten.

The function of memory, how and why people remember, is very important in commemorative funerary ritual. Indeed, the main function of funerary festivals is to recall the dead. There has been a surge in recent years on the discussion of memory which I will not reiterate here (Cubitt 2007; Connerton 1989; Jones 2007; Hope and Huskinson 2011). Rather, my discussion on memory will focus primarily on memory as an embodied experience and the function of artifacts as mnemonic aids.

Memory is more than the ability to simply recall stored information, and it is now more commonly understood as an embodied experience. That is, memory is an active process in which our interaction with the "world builds up an understanding of relationships between the past, present and future" (Graham 2011, 26). Embodied memory is shaped through our sensory experience, since it is through our senses that we negotiate our position within the world. This is particularly relevant when there is interaction between people and material objects such as artifacts, tombs, and paintings. According to Andrew Jones, it is material objects which form the "ground for humans to experience memory" (2007, 22). For Jones, material culture reveals the past through the existence of objects, as well as through the sensory experience of them, providing a framework for remembrance. More specifically, it is social practices such as funerary festivals, in which objects (frescoes) are utilized to provide a framework for how "remembrance is socially experienced" (Jones 2007, 22, 225). This is important for understanding the role of tombs and frescoes in the promotion of memory in ancient Rome. How a person died, how they were commemorated, how they were mourned, and (particularly of interest for this paper) how they were remembered were integral to the Roman experience.

Archeological evidence such as tombs and grave goods functioned as a visual eulogy for the deceased, drawing attention to their achievements during their life,

highlighting their value, social status, identity, and beliefs. Frescoes, often commissioned by the deceased or their families, underscored the deceased's achievements, and expressed their values, beliefs, tastes, and social identity. During annual funerary festivals such as the *Parentalia* or the *Lemuria*, family and friends would visit the grave of the deceased. During these visits, the frescoes that decorated the catacomb walls were viewed. The images acted as mnemonic devices, intended to promote the deceased's memory and identity. This is a significant issue for funerary rituals, since as noted earlier in this chapter one of the main functions of these rituals was to ensure the dead were not forgotten. Images or frescoes that were commissioned for tombs and catacombs assisted in preserving the memory of the dead. This memorialization was not possible without the annual funerary festivals in which the living would gaze upon the frescoes, and thus recall the deceased.

Jones is especially interested in how aspects of time affect memory. According to him, it is through temporal distance that material culture not only represents the past, but more importantly objects index past activities of production, construction, and wear. His concern is how individuals access this information or past events; that is, how are these events remembered? It is through our senses that we understand objects as indices of past actions, of past memories, which would suggest, according to Jones, that objects do not simply render the past in physical form but rather "*evoke* remembrance" of past events, occasioning the act of memory (Jones 2007, 24–25). Indeed, Jones argues that remembrance should be understood as a "dialogical encounter between the experiencing person and the artifact" (Jones 2007, 25–26). This dialogue is expressed through the material object's indices, which enable people to remember. This aspect of memory and its function is significant when looking at the fresco of the SW in Via Latina catacomb, as it is through visual art that memory of the deceased is recalled during the ritualized act of looking and remembering.

Memory also involves highly stylized performative acts such as the weekly Eucharistic meal performed at Sunday Mass, a ritual which promotes the memory of the passion of Jesus. On the one hand, memory at its core is individualistic, as each person will experience both objects and events differently, even if those events, for example, are experienced collectively. On the other hand, memory is at the same time collective in that all reference to memory is negotiated within a larger social framework. Rafael Rodriguez has examined the phenomena of memory and how it functions in individuals belonging to groups or cultures: what motivates people to remember, the resources that aid in recalling such as rites, and the context in which the act of remembering takes place (2010, 41–80). Like Cubitt, Rodriguez (citing Maurice Halbwachs) argues that it is in societies that people recall, understand, and situate their memories (2010, 42). Although the act of memory happens to the individual, the formation or understanding of the memory is shaped and defined within the individual's community. As Rodriguez notes, this is not simply a symbiotic relationship between the individual and society; rather, all remembering takes place within a social context, with its social materials, and in response to its social cues. This is the case even if individuals remember alone, since our ability to

recall and understand these memories happens with "social materials, within social contexts, […] in response to social cues … [and] with reference to our social identities" (Rodriguez 2010, 42, quoting Olick 2006, 11).

Memory in the Roman world was very important. People from all levels of society commemorated their dead, whether they crudely recorded the names of their loved ones on a slab which covered their resting place, placed more elaborate images of the deceased worked in gold leaf and fixed into the plaster of the loculus, or decorated entire rooms. Memorializing the dead was important to all. One way in which the dead were memorialized was through annual commemorative funerary rituals. In antiquity, people in the Roman world held that the dead were always present in some way and had some sort of influence on the living. But, as Valerie Hope points out, it is often unclear exactly where the dead were thought to reside or how their influence was felt (2009, 98). Franz Cumont argues that the dead were thought to continue to be a presence at the tomb and often retained all the "needs and feelings which were previously theirs" (1959, 47; see Hopkins 1983, 23). In fact, a belief existed that the dead received nourishment from the food and drink that was poured down to them through pipes or holes (Toynbee 1971, 51; Jensen 2008, 114). The dead received this nourishment during the annual festivals, when family and friends would gather at the tomb to commemorate the departed with a funerary meal or *refrigerium* (funerary picnic). An inscription found at one of the tombs in Rome, for example, states the hope that the deceased would "come in good health to the funeral feast and enjoy themselves along with everyone else" (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6.26554; cited in Hopkins 1983, 233).

Unlike Christianity, which developed a clear doctrine of death and the afterlife, not all pagans agreed on what happened after the body died. Writing in 45 BCE, Cicero comments on the diverse nature of death:

> We must first then consider what death, which seems to be a thing well known to everyone, is in itself. Some consider death the separation of the soul from the body; some think there is no such separation, but that the soul and body perish together and the soul is annihilated with the body. Of those who think that there is a separation of the soul some hold that it is at once dispersed in space, others that it survives a long time, others that it survives forever.
>
> *(Tusculan Disputations 1.9.18 [King, Loeb Classical Library])*

Regardless of the wide speculation over the nature of death, the dead were to be honored and remembered, whether they were pagans or Christians. Indeed, it is significant to note that although Christians had a more defined understanding of what happened after death, they continued to practice some of the funerary customs of pagan Romans, such as the *conclamatio* (calling out the deceased's name) and the funerary meal, such as the annual *Parentalia* (Rebillard 2003, 129). Ausonius of Bordeaux, a professed Christian, Roman poet, and tutor to the future emperor Gratian in 364 CE, wrote a poem about the *Parentalia* by the same name. In his

dirge, Ausonius' grief is expressed in the memorial words for his dead relatives, suggesting that for him the *Parentalia* remains a time for honoring the deceased and less a time for drunken delights. As Éric Rebillard points out, however, not all early Christian theologians, such as John Chrysostom, thought Christians should practice traditional mourning (2003, 132, 143). Tertullian, writing in the third century, is also often cited as proof that Christians did not participate in funerary banquets (*De Spectaculis*, 13.3–4), yet despite the censure of these notables, such practices evidently continued among Christians. In the fourth century, Augustine expresses his disapproval at their continued practice:

> Rioting and drunkenness were considered so permissible and tolerable that they are practiced not only on holy days, when the blessed martyrs are honoured, — a lamentable sight to anyone who looks on such festivities with more than a carnal eye, — but even on any and every day.
>
> *(Letter 22.3 [LCL, Baxter])*

That Christians continued to practice established, conventional funerary rituals well into the late fourth century is important for my argument, as Vilantia was buried in a mixed catacomb constructed in the mid-fourth century. This catacomb contains burial places for both pagans and Christians, along with pagan and Christian iconography. It is reasonable to argue that with such a mixture of images, visitors to the catacomb continued to participate in long-established Roman funerary rituals. Moreover, it is unclear what authority the church had at this time with regard to the Via Latina catacomb. We know that in the early third century Pope Zepherynus (195–217 CE) appointed Callistus, the future pope of Rome, to oversee burial operations, presumably over the catacomb which bears his name, the San Callisto (Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni 2002, 13; Mancinelli 1981, 21). Antonio Ferrua, however, questions whether the church had any authority over the Via Latina, because of the catacomb's diversity with regard to pagan images, e.g., Cleopatra or Hercules placed alongside Jesus and Paul. Ferrua claims that no ecclesiastic body would have permitted such a mixed repertoire of images (1960, 90). Rebillard agrees that the church had little or no role in the Via Latina catacomb but dismisses Ferrua's claim, stating that the Via Latina and other mixed catacombs simply "escaped ecclesiastical control," and are primarily evidence for pagans and Christians using the same catacombs (2003, 34).

Although there has been an increased interest in the area of ritual studies, when searching through the many books on early Roman death and memory one is hard pressed to find a definition of ritual. This not to say that ritual is absent from scholarly discussions, but rather the term is often used without a definition (see Morris 1992, 8). Hal Taussig provides a more developed statement of Roman era ritual, citing scholars such Bell, Smith, Bourdieu, Turner, and Douglas (Taussig 2009, 55–85). The opposite is true for anthropological studies, where there are many and sometimes competing definitions. In fact, trying to wade through the plethora of scholarly debates on ritual can be a daunting task, as no two scholars seem to

agree on one definition. This problem is so pervasive that scholars such as Ronald Grimes or Bruce Kapferer note that coming to a precise definition of ritual is a lost cause (Kapferer 2005, 36; Grimes 2014, 186). Pascal Boyer writes with regard to the theory of religious ritual: "I do not propose to give a new 'theory of religious ritual'; indeed, one of the main points of the argument is that there is no unified set of phenomena that could be the object of such a theory" (1994, 185). As a result, a proper definition of ritual and its function is not an easy task, as the term is often broadly employed and frequently left unclear in its usage.

Catherine Bell in her analysis does not attempt to provide a new theory of ritual, nor does she attempt to define ritual as a universal idea, since it exists within a highly structured environment and is given meaning through social agents who construct the environment, thus making it difficult to universalize. Rather, Bell provides a new framework in which to consider ritual's usage. Rather than use the term "ritual," she suggests we use the term "ritualization," a process which allows for ordinary activities to be differentiated and contrasted to similar ritualized activities. She argues:

> Semiologically speaking, just as a sign or text derives its significance by virtue of its relationship to other signs and texts, basic to ritualization is the inherent significance it derives from its interplay and contrast with other practices. From this viewpoint, there would be little content to any attempt to generate a cross-cultural or universal meaning to ritual. Likewise, this view suggests that the significance of ritual behavior lies not in being an entirely separate way of acting, but in how such activities constitute themselves as different and in contrast to other activities. … Acting ritually is first and foremost a matter of nuanced contrasts and the evocation of strategic, value-laden distinction.
>
> *(1992, 90)*

An example cited by Bell is the distinction between the ordinary act of eating bread and that of eating Christian Eucharistic bread. For Bell, ritualization is a product of differentiation and the production of ritualized acts; that is, the act of ritualization sets apart certain mundane activities, and this act in turn has the ability to establish and contrast such activities as being more important or powerful than usual (Bell 1992, 90, 140). Moreover, ritualization and its significance for "social agents" is shaped by its environment, by the space in which it is enacted:

> Ritualizing schemes invoke a series of privileged oppositions that, when acted in space and time through a series of movements, gestures, and sounds, effectively structure and nuance an environment. … This environment, constructed and reconstructed by the actions of the social agents within it, provides an experience of the objective reality of the embodied subjective schemes that created it.
>
> *(Bell 1992, 140)*

Bell's use of ritualization is important for interpreting Roman funerary meals, which are similar to that of the ordinary meal consumed at the *domus*, yet are eaten at the tomb (*refrigerium*) during the *Parentalia*; likewise with commemorative art, such as frescos found in catacombs, which function within the ritualized meal to promote the memory of the deceased.

In her analysis of ritual, Mary Douglas notes how external symbols affect the brain and body, "functioning as a mnemonic action of rites." For example, an actor may intellectually know how to interpret his or her part but is unable to produce the desired action. When a prop is given to the actor, however, the symbol enables him or her to give a flawless performance (Douglas 2002, 78–79). This is significant. As Barry Stevenson points out, ritual is shaped not only within itself, as with the case cited above, but also by texts and other media, such as visual media (2015, 80–81). Douglas' claim is, therefore, meaningful for my argument, as it is the fresco of the Samaritan woman that facilitates memorialization, and that process happens through the ritualization of this image during commemorative meals. The ritualized interaction with the image occurs as the mourners visit the tomb and gaze upon the fresco. This prompts the viewers to remember the deceased, associating her memory with the image of the SW from the gospel narrative.

In his search for a definition of ritual, Ronald Grimes characterizes ritual as embodied, condensed, and prescribed enactment, which works well for my argument. For Grimes, ritual is *embodied* since it is not simply a mental act, but involves both the mind and the body. It is *condensed*; that is, it is not every day ordinary behavior, but is "extraordinary" behavior that is "packed tightly" with meaning. It is *prescribed* in that there are right and wrong ways to perform rituals. Lastly, ritual is *enacted* such that it requires a special type of action, separate and distinct from ordinary action. Although it involves contrived activity, it is not to be mistaken for pretend such as the theatre, but is understood as somehow being real or true (Grimes 2014, 195–96).

Following Barry Stevenson and Ronald Grimes, who caution that a perfect and precise definition of ritual is fleeting at best, I define ritual as a type of communication expressed in action, which may be understood as a discourse that is verbal or nonverbal (Grimes 2014, 190; Stephenson 2015, 8). It requires a physical doing or participation in a repetitive activity that involves gestures, acts, and utterances, often embedded in rules and regulations, and it may or may not be rooted in religious activity. Ritual by this definition is situated in special places and during specific times, and often involves qualified people (Grimes 2014, 190, 194; Stephenson 2015, 8). This is a useful definition for my case study since my focus on ritual activity takes place at the tomb, and while there is no explicit set of actions for the participants during the funerary meals, there are particular established modes of action for remembering the dead, such as the offering of libations and gazing at images which represent the dead.

Rituals are also defined as a "means of sociocultural integration, appropriation, or transformation" (Bell 1992, 16), which raises the question of the function of ritual in regard to ritual participants, and more specifically how ritual influences

the viewers when interpreting the fresco of the SW and how this image promotes the deceased's social identity. The work of Coleman Baker is useful for my study, as he examines the way in which narratives shape social identity and social memory. This is of particular interest not only when it is applied to the narrative of the Gospel of John, specifically 4:1–42, but to the fresco of the Samaritan woman and Jesus, as both forms of communication, text and image, would have promoted social memory and identity. Baker builds on the work of Paul Ricoeur, who maintains that the narrative shapes the identity of reader/hearer, which is acquired via a three-fold process: (1) *prefiguration*, which involves the readers/hearers bringing their own experiences and understanding to the text; (2) *configuration*, which allows for the author's construction of the text as well as the readers'/hearers' interaction within the narrative world of the text; and (3) *refiguration*, which brings together the world of the text and the world of the readers. The final process not only reinforces previous identity and memory but may also provide the occasion to reform or even create new identity as the readers/hearers assimilate the information acquired in the *configuration* process (Baker 2014, 105–106, 117–118).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the deceased (Vilantia) possibly knew of the SW through the Gospel of John, whether she read it for herself or heard it read aloud in a liturgical setting. Regardless of how Vilantia came to be aware of it, the narrative of the SW must have resonated with her on some cognitive level, such that she commissioned the painting of the SW for her tomb. Narrative theory is especially helpful to consider, as it draws attention to the relationship between the characters in the text and the audience, whether they are readers or hearers, "through interaction and revision" (Baker 2014, 114). This relationship is best expressed through Wolfgang Iser's argument that reading/hearing a text is not a one-way process, but that in fact it is a dynamic and interactive process between the text and reader (Iser 1978, 107, 152). The reader/hearer does not passively receive information from the text but is actively engaged in the production of meaning. Indeed, the reader/hearer "interacts with the text by anticipating and revising its expectations/opinions and filling in the gaps in the narrative," a relationship which in turn, as Ricouer has argued, facilitates the shaping of identity (see Baker 2014, 114). Moreover, narrative identity remains in flux, as it is constructed and reconstructed between the readers/ hearers, "whose present identity has been constructed by [their] social memory, and the text, which reinforces previous identity and memory or seeks to counter and reform identity and memory" (Baker 2014, 115). This is also the case for historical narratives such as the gospels, which reflect group identity as well as connect individuals to the group (Baker 2014, 115). This is noteworthy for Vilantia, whose knowledge of the SW, as I mentioned above, would have been through the text of John. As such, the gospel narrative – specifically John 4:1–42 and the role of the SW – conceivably shaped her social identity and memory. When reading the gospel account, it is possible that the SW functioned as the prototype for Vilantia and her community, such that the SW exemplified the community and its ideals.

The fresco of the SW not only created an identity for the deceased, but also functioned in creating a larger group identity. Baker's argument proves fruitful

when examining how group identity is formulated and, in some cases, sustained. Significant to his argument are what social identity theorists (SIT) call prototypes, or leaders of recategorization. Citing Eliot R. Smith and Michael A. Zarate, Baker notes that a

> group's prototype can be a representation of a person[s] that embodies the identity of the group, though the prototype does not necessarily have to be an actual or current member of the group but rather an ideal image of the group's character.
>
> *(Baker 2014, 109)*

Aspects of group cohesion and identity are also examined by Steven Muir. In Muir's analysis of group identity, the group identifies itself as a "distinct collective" by recognizing "some commonalties or similarities among themselves" (Muir 2014, 431–32), similarities that may well include a recognized prototype. Nor should the prototype be understood as a fixed character that group members are meant to imitate, but rather the prototype should be understood as being fluid or in flux, as later generations may reinterpret the prototype according to the group's current needs. For Baker, this raises questions regarding the role of social memory in the process of recategorization, such that the previous group's prototype must be "remembered and commemorated in meaningful ways for their prototypical status to remain effective" (Baker 2014, 109).

Following Jan Assman, Baker notes that social memory theory has two phases: first is *communicative memory* and is characterized by direct one-on-one circulation, often with eyewitnesses, a phase that can only last a few generations. The second phase takes place as the group distances itself over time from the original memories and is characterized by *cultural memory*; that is, the limitations of *communicative memory* forces the community to recreate the past through texts, images, and rituals which reinforce the society's identity or self-image (Baker 2014, 110). If we apply these notions to the Via Latina fresco, it is possible that the SW functioned as a prototype for Vilantia and her community. The deceased may have been the community's leader or teacher, or she may have had a significant missionary role in their community, fostering a larger collective identity.

Visual aids such as Roman portraits, more specifically funerary portraits, may also contribute to the shaping of memory and identity. The commissioning of portraits was not limited to the élite in society, such as emperors and the aristocracy, who had portraits of themselves erected in public areas such as fora and theatres (Zanker 1990). Those from the lower echelons also kept portraits in their homes or tombs. Often it was freedmen and freedwomen who wished to visually express their newly found social status on their tombs, emphasizing their upward mobility, success in business, intellectual interests, or wealth (Fejfer 2008, 110; Kampen 1993, 116). One well-known example comes from Pompeii, where a man and his wife who owned one of the local bakeries commissioned a portrait of themselves to be displayed in one of the reception spaces, room *g*, directly opposite corridor *m*, which leads

from the bakery. The street entrance to the couples' private dwelling is at number 6, entering into a large vestibule (*a*) which then opens into the atrium (*b*). The bakery is entered through number 3 and consists of rooms *a* through *s*. According to John Clarke, rather than positioning the portrait facing entrance *a*, which leads into their house, the shop owners purposefully chose room *g* so that those visiting the bakery would see the portrait (Clarke 2003, 261–62). Clarke also argues that this portrait is unusual, in that many portraits that are preserved from antiquity are sculptures, and those paintings that do exist are often idealized and depict only a few, if any, individual traits. This makes the Pompeian example even more remarkable as its subjects are shown in a realistic manner, gazing at the viewer in order to draw them into the image (2003, 262). Indeed, the couple depicted in the painting bear close resemblance to mummy portraits found in Roman Egypt, which are known for their realistic and sometimes haunting depictions of the patrons. In this Pompeian painting, both the man and the woman possess tools of literacy and learning: the wife holds a stylus and wax tablet used for writing and her husband a scroll, which may emphasize idealized values rather than any actual real literary skills. Regardless, the observer sees them as they wished to be remembered.

Most portraits served the function of honoring the lives of the living, their virtues, achievements, and benefactions; provided permanent votive memorials in sanctuaries; and conveyed power and authority (Stewart 2008, 77–78). The significance of portraits and the emotions they evoke is attested in the novel *Callirhoe*, in which Callirhoe laments her capture by slaves:

> As she beat her breast with her fist, she saw on her ring the image of Chaereas, and kissing it, she said, "Chaereas, now I am truly lost to you, separated by so vast a sea. You are repenting in grief as you sit by the empty tomb, bearing witness to my chastity after my death, while I, the daughter of Hermocrates, your wife, have today been sold to a master!" So she lamented, and it was long before sleep finally came.
>
> *(Chariton, Callirhoe 1.14 [Goold, LCL])*

Portraits, however, do not function only as a visual representation of the achievements and virtues of the person portrayed – in the example above Chaereas, the sitter – but also are a reminder for the viewer of the person depicted, such as the situation of Callirhoe whose portrait of Chaereas reminded her of his absence. Portraits, whether they are engraved on a ring, painted on a wall, or depict the living or the dead, all have the potential to embody meaning and evoke memory, to, as Elsner aptly puts it, "replace their subjects when the sitter is absent" (1998, 97; see Hope, 2011, 176–195). But the ubiquity of portraits in Roman art also suggests that they functioned as a means to establish and maintain identity throughout the Roman Empire (D'Ambra 1998, 93).

The funerary context attests to one the most abundant settings for Roman portraits; they are frequently found at tombs. These line the main streets leading in and out of Rome, Ostia, and Pompeii, as well as underground in the catacombs

scattered around Rome, and could take the form of statues, busts, paintings and even engraved rings.

The earliest literary evidence of portraits being displayed in the Roman *domus* (household) is from the late third or early second century BCE, and these texts usually describe them as being ancestral masks or *imagines mairorum* (Fejfer 2008, 90). Harriet Flower notes that the earliest Roman author to mention the *imagines* was Plautus in his *Amphitryo* (458–9), written around 190 BCE (Flower 1996, 33, 46). In its technical usage, *imagines mairorum* refers to Roman wax portraits of male ancestors that were displayed in wooden cupboards (*armaria*) in the atrium of the Roman house and worn by actors in aristocratic funerary processions to evoke the deceased among the living (Flower 1996, 32, 37; Hope 2009, 74–77). Aristocratic funerals were often large, elaborate public events in which hired actors wore the masks of the deceased during procession (*pompa*). According to Polybius, the actors were expected to impersonate their subjects, and as such these masks were similar to those worn in the theatre, having eye holes and allowing the actor to breathe (Flower 1996, 37). For those who had little money, the funeral procession would have been modest and quick. Limited finances would have made hired mourners and musicians unaffordable (Hope 2009, 76).

It is important to note that *imagines maiorum* were wax masks or portraits made during the life of the person, and "had no role to play in cult or commemoration of the dead at the tomb" (Flower 1996, 2). This is not to say that *imagines* had no role in the formation of memory; indeed, they had an integral role in recalling the lives and deeds of deceased members of aristocratic families. Moreover, the *imagines maiorum* only represented those men who held at least the office of *aedile*, Roman magistrates who were responsible for maintaining city infrastructure such as roads and public buildings as well as maintaining public order. Since women could not hold public office, they could not be represented by the *imagines* (Flower 1996, 2). The masks were, therefore, primarily socio-political in their use and were only tangentially related to any beliefs about the afterlife. For example, Flower notes that when actors wore the masks during the funeral procession and for the eulogy, it was to politicize the event; that is, they were used to recall the individual's life, deeds, and qualities, memorializing their service to the state (Flower 1996, 2, 11).

Yet, Flower also shows that the technical term *imago* was not a fixed term in the Roman art world and could be applied to paintings, gems, reliefs, busts, and shield portraits. It could also depict an exact likeness of the deceased or function as a reflection (Flower 1996, 33–35). For Plautus, the *imago* can mean both an exact likeness (*Amphitryo* 120–144), or it may refer to a portrait of a soldier on a ring: "For this reason the soldier has left a token here, his picture pressed into wax from his ring, so that the pimp would send me away together with the man who brought here a token similar to that one" (*Pseud*. 55 [De Melo, LCL]). Another example is found in the Casa del Menandro at Pompeii, where four busts of ancestors, most likely made from wood, were found at the back of the peristyle garden (Flower 1996, 42). Flower objects to Clarke's claim (1991, 192–93) that these busts were "actual *imagines*." Moreover, she points out that these busts should not be understood in the original

sense of the meaning of *imagines* because they were not kept in the *atrium* and were associated with a family cult, which was not linked with *imagines* (Flower 1996, 43). This is not to say that the busts did not represent the ancestors; indeed, Flower notes that while they may not be actual *imagines maiorum*, they could "represent the … distant but famous ancestors of the owner of the house" (Flower 1996, 44).

In fact, it was not uncommon for freedmen and freedwomen to show funerary portraits of themselves in cupboards, mimicking the *imagines maiorum*. One example, an extant grave relief, depicts the portrait of a freedman and freedwoman in cupboards with open doors, acting as pseudo-imagines. As Flower remarks, these portraits are not true *imagines* but busts of the deceased, particularly since the portrait on the right is of a woman (Flower 1996, 7). Although the wax masks lost their significance during the early Roman Empire, alternative portraits such as busts began to appear in the funerary repertoire (Toynbee, 1971, 48; Fejfer 2008, 90). This was a concern for Pliny the Elder, who complained "the painting of portraits, used to transmit through the ages extremely correct likenesses of persons, has entirely gone out. Bronze shields are now set up as monuments with a design in silver, with only a faint difference between the figures" (*Nat.* 35.4 [Rackham, LCL]). Tondo portraits of mythical busts found in the atrium of the Villa of Poppea may have been one such instance which triggered Pliny's criticism.

Outside of Rome, the Tomb of the Three Brothers in Palmyra (possibly painted around 160–191 CE) depicts nine tondo portraits of either male or female busts each supported by a Victoria, the Roman goddess of victory. Fejfer argues that the Palmyra tondo portraits were possible imitations of *clipeatae imagines*, "which were associated with the old-fashioned public honours in Rome" and that of the Roman emperor with the figure of Victoria (Fejfer 2008, 156). These portraits bear a striking resemblance to the portrait of the deceased, a young girl, in the Via Latina catacomb in cubiculum O. The Palmyra tomb, moreover, has decorative features similar to those found in the Via Latina catacomb (cubiculum N) and in the mausoleum of Santa Costanza in Rome.

The numerous extant portraits, whether they be on rings, shield portraits, or frescoes found on funerary monuments, attest not only to the significance of portraits for maintaining identity and social status, but also to the variety of ways that Romans utilized portraiture; that is, the *imagines* were not static but a dynamic medium used for remembering the living and the dead. The variety of portraits, furthermore, supports my reading of the fresco of the SW and its relationship to the tondo portrait of a woman painted immediately above it on the arch. The patron's relationship to the SW is expressed through the tondo portrait, which evokes the ancestor masks used by elite Roman families. The tondo is not intended to be a direct likeness, since as mentioned earlier in this chapter the *imago* was a fluid term in Roman art, but rather is meant to evoke the presence of the deceased. By appropriating the use of these masks in the form of a tondo, the patron situates herself directly in dialogue with the SW through the tondo's gaze.

The function of the gaze in artworks was important for those participants who honored the annual funerary rituals. Jaś Elsner, in his work on the gaze, emphasizes

its role not only as a focalizer of the subject's position, but also its influence on the external viewer (Elsner 2007, 109). In Elsner's treatment of the mythological theme of Ariadne gazing out at Theseus' ship as it departs for sea, he argues that the main subject in many Campania frescoes is the gaze (Elsner 2007, 100). For example, a painting from the *triclinium* (dining room) of the Casa di Cornelius Diadumenus depicts a multi-dialogical relationship between the protagonist, Ariadne, and the other spectators in the scene. As Ariadne gazes (with the intimate help of a winged female figure) upon Theseus as he sails off to Athens, Eros, positioned with his back to the ship, covers his eyes while weeping. To the right of the main image are two figures, a male with an oar looking up or at Ariadne, and a female gazing up toward Athena and another figure who is reclining. Elsner notes that depicting multiple gazes which focus on different objects and in different directions redirects the point of focalization back to the viewer, prompting them to question "what point of view, what hierarchy of significance, what object of the gaze they themselves will apply to this (or any) painting" (Elsner 2007, 100).

The role of the gaze in cubiculum F, the location of the SW and the tondo portrait, also evokes questions of internal looking, of focalizing the external viewer's gaze to other areas of the painting, as well as evoking questions of viewer participation and memory. Moreover, the gaze raises questions as to how individuals or communities used art to construct and signify meaning such as: How are we to explain the relationship between the SW, the tondo, and the patron who commissioned the artwork? How do we explain the angle of the gaze of the tondo image in relation to the figure of the SW? Does the tondo portrait represent the female patron? More specifically, how do these two frescoes depict the patron's perception of herself and how she wished to be remembered within her immediate community?

The gaze or the act of looking is an important feature for the artist(s) who painted cubiculum F and for his/her patrons, and one of its main functions is to include viewer participation in memorializing the deceased. Unlike street tombs, which often have epitaphs that recount the lives of the dead and evoke their memory, catacombs employ the gaze in order to evoke memory and create meaning; in other words, by using the gaze the artist is able to focus the external viewer's attention not only onto him/herself, but is also able to use it to direct the viewer to other areas of the painting. An interaction of gazes takes place within the arcosolium that depicts the SW. She is the one who is both the object of focalization and the one who focalizes; that is, as the SW gazes at Jesus, she gestures with her finger towards him, who then forces the re-focalization back onto her, while the woman in the tondo, with her head tilted, looks down at the SW. This network of internal spectators directs the gaze of external viewers, prompting them to question the meaning of the fresco, particularly in reference to the deceased. The activity of looking is particularly significant when combined with commemorative activity, as it provides a way for the viewer to participate in the ritualized act of remembering.

The function of the SW fresco and the tondo portrait in cubiculum F is highlighted by the role these images play in association with funerary rituals. To put it another way, ritual is the performative action through which memory is stimulated,

and the remembering of the dead occurs when the living visit graves to make offer-
ings and to share a meal during the annual festivals. As mentioned above, when the
living viewed the frescoes, the images acted as mnemonic devices, promoting the
memory of the dead person in the mind of the viewer. Romans believed that the
dead not only continued to reside in and around the tomb but could also affect
other aspects of the lives of the living, becoming a potential threat (Ovid, *Fasti*
2.537–570). Indeed, when honoring the deceased, caution had to be exercised since
the dead could wander among the living and cause harm. Ovid warns that during
these rites it was an inauspicious time for weddings and honoring the gods (*Fasti*
2.560–570). Funerary rituals, therefore, provided the means to placate the dead as
well as honor and remember them.

Roman funerary rituals occurred several times a year: the *Lemuria*, *Caristia*, and
Parentalia. Possibly the best known and attested funerary ritual is the *Parentalia*, or
dies Parentales, which takes place 13–21 February. The first few days were set aside
for private family celebration but the last day, the *Feralia*, was reserved for public
celebration (Toynbee 1971, 64). The *Parentalia*, as was the case with other festivals,
was a time to communicate with the dead and remember them, a time to feast
(*refrigerium*) and share a meal with the dead at the tomb. Ovid provides an excellent
description of the festival, outlining the traditions and regulations. He notes that the
dead require very little: "tile wreathed with votive garlands, a sprinkling of corn, a
few grains of salt, bread soaked in wine, and some loose violets, these are offerings
enough" (*Fasti* 2.533–545 [LCL, Goold]). It was important to observe this ritual.
Ovid notes one occasion when it was neglected in favor of war, forcing the shades
to punish the living for ignoring their obligation:

> they say, though I can hardly think it, that the ancestral souls did issue from
> the tombs and make their moan in the hours of stilly night; and hideous
> ghosts, a shadowy throng, they say, did howl about the city streets and the
> wide fields.
>
> *(Fasti 2.550–54 [LCL, Goold])*

As late as the fourth century, the period in which the Via Latina catacomb was
constructed, it is worth reiterating here that some Christians continued to practice
such funerary rituals, as previously noted by Augustine and Ausonius, and these
rituals were also extended to the cult of the martyrs (Rebillard 2003, 142). Other
funerary feasts included the deceased's birthday, the *Mania*, festival of roses (in May
and mid-July), and festival of violets (in March), when the tomb was decorated with
flowers (Hope 2009, 98–99).

The Via Latina catacomb and the fresco of the SW provides an excellent case
study by which to understand early Christian funerary ritual, to understand group
social dynamics, and the function of memory. The purpose of these rituals, in par-
ticular the *Parentalia*, was to encourage family and friends to visit the tomb of the
deceased, to share a meal with the dead, and most importantly to remember them.
The group context coupled with the ritualized activity and the fresco provided an

arena in which meaning was generated and perpetuated. For the woman buried in the Via Latina catacomb in cubiculum F, this ritual meant that family and close friends would view the image she chose for her tomb, an image which draws attention to her social status, beliefs, identity, and values, as well as reinforce group identity. These characteristics or values are communicated to the viewer through the gestures, glances, and poses of the figures, as well as through the narrative of the Samaritan woman from the Gospel of John. In this visual presentation of John's story, Vilantia is the protagonist, situated between Jesus and the SW. Her position within the narrative is emphasized through the tondo's gaze that falls directly onto the SW, who represents positive ideals such as leadership, intellect, and political activity, all ideals that the deceased shares with the SW and by which she wished to be remembered by her community.

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PART III

Contesting and creating
ritual protocols

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7

RITUAL NEGOTIATION

Jason T. Lamoreaux

Introduction

In the field of New Testament studies, the idea of looking at ritual studies as a viable source of questions is a recent endeavor. Given what we know of early Christianity and the innovation inherent in the burgeoning of the new religious movement, it is odd that ritual has been left out of the discussion for so long. This chapter attempts to ask questions about rituals and about the negotiations that occur between groups and individuals in the Corinthian context reflected in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. My purpose here is to demonstrate the utility of the model ritual negotiations offers and utilize it as an interpretive tool for interacting with the text of 1 Corinthians 8–10. In this regard, my goal is simple, but it is an important first step in making clear the utility and importance of ritual studies in interpreting New Testament texts. To accomplish these goals, I will first discuss the state of the secondary literature on 1 Cor 8–10 as it pertains to the groups that are addressed in the text. Second, I delineate a model for ritual negotiation and failure. Third, I look at Paul's claims to authority within the entire letter in order to set up a context for his claims in 1 Cor 8–10. Lastly, I apply the model and what we know of Paul's claims to 1 Cor 8–10 in a brief analysis of those chapters in order to highlight the utility of the questions ritual studies raises about the text.

State of the question

Much of the scholarly literature on 1 Corinthians 8–11 understands these chapters as a unit (Ellington 2011; Fotopoulos 2003; Murphy-O'Connor 1978; Still 2002; Willis 1985; Newton 1998; Phua 2005). While they are rhetorically connected, addressing the topic of communal food practices, the chapters are often divorced from the rest of the letter and its context. Others have been preoccupied with

theological significance and application, placing Paul in the center as though he is the representative of truth. As Stanley Stowers has noted:

> The study of the New Testament has understandably been dominated by the internal perspectives of Christian theology. This means that approaches to Paul's letters continually reinscribe an incomparable uniqueness and irresistible relevance.
>
> *(Stowers 2011, 105)*

In this regard, Paul's positions are often taken for granted as correct or benevolent in some way. Questions evoked by ritual studies complicate that position, as I will demonstrate below.

The scholarly literature also concentrates on the parties reflected in Paul's discussion: "the weak" (1 Cor 8:11), "the knowledgeable" (1 Cor 8:1), and Paul himself (Phua 2005, 1). Since the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how groups interact with one another through ritual negotiations, how scholars perceive the various groups is important. The scholarly literature represents several positions.

The first of these positions understands the parties involved along ethnic lines. Given the larger issues around table fellowship in early Christianity, many scholars see the issues within 1 Corinthians 8–10 as pivoting on issues surrounding Jewish meal practices and the condemnation of participation in Greek and Roman practices. This idea began with Baur's work and has been nuanced in various ways by later scholars (Baur 1876, 259–67). Manson modified Baur's theory and claimed that the "Cephas party" brought up the issue of idol meat (Manson 1962, 200; see also Ehrhardt 1964, 277–78; Barrett 1968, 50–56; Cheung 1999; Tomson 1990, 200). However, the passing reference to Cephas (1 Cor 9:5) provides little data, and the interpretations that stem from it, while possible, are a stretch.

Along the line of ethnic groups, Schmithals suggested that we take the knowledgeable as representative of Jewish Gnostics (Schmithals 1971, 225–29). Horsley and Pearson point instead to Jewish wisdom as central to unlocking our understanding of the weak and those who have "gnosis" or knowledge (Horsley 1998, 117; Pearson 1973, 28–33). Later contributors, such as Willis, Witherington, Murphy-O'Connor, Fee, and Gooch, attempted to downplay the role of the Jewish context altogether. They place 1 Corinthians 8–10 exclusively in the context of Greek and Roman meals (Willis 1985; Newton 1998; Witherington 1995; Murphy-O'Connor 1978; Fee 1980; Gooch 1993). Lastly, Phua has made the case that all three parties are, in some way, connected to Judaism in its various forms and theological positions at the time (Phua 2005, 201).

Another solution was eventually proposed that involved seeing "the weak" as the poor and "the knowledgeable" as those who were financially better off. This idea began with the work of Gerd Theissen (1989, 69–72, 102–104). This position has been nuanced and consistent among scholars writing after Theissen. While this is the case, and there has been a sort of consensus on the issue, each scholar has added nuances to the discussion (Meeks 2003, 68–70; Clarke 1993; Martin, 1995;

Horrell 1996; Lim 2012, 158). Again, it is difficult to assess why social standing is at the heart of the argument à la Theissen given what we know, or do not know, from the text. While the argument is plausible, the gaps being filled here seem rather large and without sufficient content in the letter to back them.

My point here is not to rehash all the major scholars' arguments but rather to make the point that each concentrate on some combination of ethnicity and social status for determining who the knowledgeable and the weak were and how they would react to eating food offered to idols. A definitive answer as to whether the weak were Jewish or whether they had low social status and whether the knowledgeable were Greek or had high status is not forthcoming. It is likely that there is no either/or answer here. The answer is likely far more complex, one which we cannot sort out from our limited information.

Theories in ritual studies offer a fresh approach to 1 Corinthians 8–10. Given that ritual contexts are spoken of in the text, although indirectly, I will turn to ritual failure and ritual negotiation as a way of opening up a new way of looking at 1 Cor 8–10. More importantly, I will discuss Paul's role as well as highlight a fourth party implied in the text that has been left out of the triangulation among the "the weak," "the knowledgeable," and Paul.

Ritual negotiation

What one realizes when reading scholarship in ritual studies is that many people have misconceptions about rituals and how they function in various contexts. The largest misconception that ritual specialists attempt to correct is that ritual is static and that it means one thing to all the people who are participating in a ritual. This could not be further from the truth. Rather than static, ritual can be, and often is, a locus of change, conflict, and negotiation (Stowers 1996, 71–72). What follows is a brief look into conceptualizations surrounding ritual negotiation and how failure is often at the center of ritual negotiations.

What is up for negotiation in 1 Corinthians 8–10 is decidedly somatic or bodily. It involves an intimate set of relational juxtapositions involving groups of individuals competing for the right to determine the meaning and impact of ritual, how those individuals locate themselves in relationship to otherworldly beings, and how those relationships are determined through somatic media. In this case, the somatic medium is had through ingestion of food. Knowledge, including that of a spiritual nature, is therefore not simply an acquisition of words or visual input but is bodily realized and practiced. This somatic intimacy happens in the actions associated with ritualization of people and objects, in this case food. But it is more than that. In the Corinthian context, while the ingesting of food is at the center of the argument, the ritual context in which said somatic actions take place are far more complex, and the meaning of the ingestion can only be fully understood within those ritualized moments. One can ingest food in various contexts, and many of them have various meanings about bodily activity.

The point here is to avoid the Cartesian idea that the mind has some superiority over the body or that the body is passive or of no consequence. Quite the contrary, embodiment is part of existential experience alongside such things as textuality and representation (Csordas 1993, 136–37). Rituals are contextualized moments or actions where somatic modes become potent in relationship to other embodied persons (Csordas 1993, 138). In 1 Corinthians 8–10, the embodied acts described are those of eating, likely in groups. Eating is not merely some abstraction described in a textual account; eating is also a concrete somatic action that entails tasting, chewing, swallowing, sensations of hunger or fullness, satisfaction, pleasure, smells, and, in the context of ritual meals, conversations and ritual actions and words. The experience of ritual is inherently somatic, and the act of eating and the context in which it happens is what is at issue in the dialogue, arguments, and negotiations among Paul, the knowledgeable, and the weak. Ritual studies' emphasis on the somatic presses us to ask, how does one's body and the act of eating relate to claims in 1 Cor 8–10 about ritual efficacy and ritual failure?

At the center of scholarship surrounding ritual negotiation is the observation that ritual is centered in fluid, rather than static, social interactions (Hüsken and Neubert 2012, 2). DeMaris makes this observation about ritual when he states, "for rites, past and present, affect not only the subject of the rite but also a broad web of social relations in which the subject is embedded" (DeMaris 2008, 24). Negotiations in relation to rituals both are symptoms and generative of social conflict and the formation and maintenance of identity. Hüsken and Neubert note that, within the context of ritual negotiation, three processes occur:

> First, *participation* comes to be regarded as central to negotiations around ritual, both as negotiated participation in ritual and as participation in the negotiations about rituals. Second, the disagreements and conflicts that are the basis of processes of negotiation seem to be caused by *subversion* of ritual prescriptions, ritual roles, and power relations surrounding the ritual performances. Third, the concept of negotiation helps to more thoroughly *contextualize* both ritual prescriptions and concrete ritual performances.
>
> *(Hüsken and Neubert 2012, 7)*

Participation is understood to include both taking part in ritual as well as refusing to do so. Also, participation presupposes a person's power in relation to the group and those who lead or determine ritual efficacy. Therefore, participation not only is relevant in terms of taking part or not but also in terms of one's place within the context of participating and the power inherent in that place (Hüsken and Neubert 2012, 6).

Ritual negotiations can take place in an organic setting, like the one we find in 1 Corinthians 8–10, where issues arise out of group conflict over various matters, or in a formal discussion about how to enact, change, or validate rituals and their contexts. An example of the latter can be found in Aristotle's *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, a handbook for public speakers which contains a section on parliamentary oratory.

Within the context of parliamentary oratory Aristotle discusses the issue of rituals and their alteration or their continued practice without alteration. I will quote only the section on alteration as a brief example, as the whole text is quite lengthy:

> When we are advocating the alteration of the sacrificial rites in the direction of greater splendor, we shall find plausible arguments for changing the ancestral institution in saying (1) that to add to what exists already is not to destroy but to amplify the established order; (2) that in all probability even the gods show more benevolence towards those who pay them more honor; (3) that even our forefathers used not to conduct the sacrifices always on the same lines, but regulated their religious observances both private and public with an eye to the occasions and to the prosperity of their circumstances; (4) that this is the manner in which we administer both our states and our private households in all the rest of our affairs as well; (5) and also specify any benefit or distinction or pleasure that will accrue to the state if these recommendations are carried out, developing the subject in the manner explained in the former cases.
>
> *(1423b [Rackham, Loeb Classical Library])*

This quote demonstrates a few things about rituals in their ancient contexts. First, it shows that people did think seriously about the nature and function of change in ritual; second, that the implications of rituals were serious business and, in this case, there was a perception that the state was at risk if things were done incorrectly; third, while this is a far more formal declaration of rules about rituals, changes, and the negotiations for those changes, it demonstrates that groups, whether large (the state) or small (the household), had a stake in what sort of changes took place and the possible implication for the collective.

While ritual negotiations can be formal in nature, with a set of rules, they can also be subversive and even violent. Rules can be broken in the service of negotiation to shed light on inter-group and extra-group conflicts. Negotiation, then, becomes a way to challenge idealized standards and to disrupt stabilized hierarchies (Hüsken and Neubert 2012, 6). Hüsken and Neubert provide an example utilizing a same-sex Jewish wedding to note how rituals can be subversive. Here they note the principle of changing identities:

> The ceremonial performance can be used to show that the couple is a "normal wed[ded] couple" by enacting traditional parts of wedding ceremonies, or the performance can demonstrate that a same-sex wedding is something special, that it stands apart from heterosexual weddings, simply by transgressing or subverting traditional forms.
>
> *(Hüsken and Neubert 2012, 7)*

Rituals, writ large, can be used as tools to challenge traditional norms, reinvent and redefine prior conceptions, and reimagine communal identities. Further, within

the contexts of communities and the negotiation that inevitably occurs, it is power that is being grappled with in the sense of who, eventually, gets to define and shape ritual itself.

Power within the context of rituals can be fluid. As negotiations occur, power in determining whether or not a ritual is efficacious is at stake. Usually, the ritual officiants or leaders will be those who determine ritual efficacy, but when a community subverts ritual, rebels against it, or demands change, ritual officiants and leaders may lose their ability to be the determining factor in ritual efficacy. As I have argued elsewhere, at the heart of Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians is Paul's need to maintain control of ritual contexts, exercise the power to determine right practice, and, because of this, determine the central identity markers for the larger group. Further, Paul sees himself as the ritual authority *par excellence*, and to deviate from his instructions is to court disaster for the community writ large (Lamoreaux forthcoming).

Paul and ritual authority

The ritual negotiations modern readers encounter in 1 Corinthians 8–10 involved three primary people or groups: the weak, the knowledgeable, and Paul. However, we only have one side of the conversation and the negotiations we encounter are from Paul's own perspective. Furthermore, a fourth group is actually part of the discussion and becomes the locus of the conflict. That group is outside of the Corinthian Jesus community and is referred to in the text as those who are probably Greek and Roman citizens participating in normal rituals surrounding meals. All three of the groups within the Corinthian community are making claims about the ritual efficacy of those participating in Greek and Roman meals involving meat sacrificed to idols. As an authoritative claim maker, Paul is arguing throughout the letter that his claim is the official one, and he follows that up with a threat at the very end of the letter. I will provide data from the letter here, but space limitations keep me from being comprehensive (Lamoreaux forthcoming).

Paul's arguments center on his ability to tap into the spiritual in a way those who disagree with him are unable to do. His purpose in these arguments is set out in 1 Corinthians 1:10:

> I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our lord Jesus Christ, so that you might speak as one and have no divisions among you, but you are made whole in the same mind and in the same purpose.

In making a plea for unity, Paul appears to be acting benevolently, with the good of the group in mind. As the letter progresses, however, his insistence on shaping communal identity through ritual and ritual contexts gets heavy handed. (If 2 Corinthians is any indication, such heavy-handedness failed.)

Paul attempts to establish his authority by making claims that he has tapped into some cosmic conduit of truth. He claims that "we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual" (1 Cor 2:12–14). He even claims to have "the mind of Christ" (2:16). Paul contrasts himself with those who are "unspiritual," setting up an opposition within the Corinthian community. He notes that "those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of god's spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (2:14). Later in the letter, Paul will make claims to right ritual practice and the inability of the community to discern these right practices (for example, 11:17–34). Paul is clearly making the claim that only he knows what is right, along with those who obey his directions. In this regard, he is not alone. He points out co-workers within the community that are given authority by him, including Apollos. Paul is the planter, while Apollos the one who waters (3:5–9). Stephanas, whom Paul recommends, is also mentioned in 1 Cor 16:15–16. These individuals are therefore god's brokers to the Corinthians, who are pictured as a passive field, receptacles of Paul's knowledge through his allies, rather than innovators in their own right, in control of their own religious and, by extension, ritual contexts (3:5–9) (Malina and Pilch 2006, 74).

Paul also claims to have intimate knowledge of Jesus (9:1–2) and conveniently is able to understand all contexts in which he finds himself (9:19–23). He even claims that he and Apollos are the "stewards of god's mysteries" (4:1). Therefore, no matter which context Paul finds himself in, whether among Greeks, Jews, or Romans, his claim to ritual superiority and knowledge is all-encompassing. As Hüsken notes, the person arguing for ritual authority within the context of a community must convince that community that her/his access to knowledge is sufficient to back said claims (Hüsken 2007, 361). It is clear from the letter as a whole that the Corinthians have innovated on ritual contexts in Paul's absence and that Paul, reacting to what he thinks is happening, is responding by making claims to spiritual and ritual authority (Lamoreaux forthcoming). He must not only make the case that his own ritual authority is valid and all-encompassing but that the innovators are in the wrong and do not have the authority to innovate in the least. In 1 Cor 8–10, Paul is attempting to exercise this sort of authority in defining ritual in three groups: the weak, the knowledgeable, and those who still participate in Greek and Roman rituals.

In 3:1–4, Paul discusses the nature of the people in the Corinthian community. Paul notes that he taught them as infants and that they were fed what children eat, milk, and that they are far from ready for "solid food" (3:2). Here we have a foreshadowing of rituals surrounding food in Cor 8–11. Paul warns the Corinthians in relating the story of the ancient Israelites, who wandered in the wilderness, and ate manna (heavenly food), and drank the water from the rock, which Paul equates with Christ (10:1–5). Yet, they still were not mature for they "rose up to play" (10:7), and as a consequence many perished. Paul goes on to talk about spiritual gifts in chapter 12 and states "there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (12:6). Paul then ranks classes within the body, beginning with "apostles" (12:28), which is Paul's self-adopted title (1:1). His

authority, therefore, trumps all others by his own definition of who has authority and who can wield it. As Paul "sits" at the table of ritual negotiation, he gives no ground to those who would be discussion partners with him. This attitude on Paul's part becomes apparent when the end of the letter is reached.

To review Paul's purposes in writing the whole of 1 Corinthians, Paul makes an appeal for unity. This unity is, of course, defined by Paul himself.

> Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.
>
> *(1:10)*

The arguments throughout the letter attempt to bolster this purpose through Paul's wielding of authority on a number of matters, many of them addressing ritual contexts: baptism (1 Cor 1:10–17), marriage (7), food offered to idols (8:1–11:1), worship (11:2–16; 14), and eucharist (11:17–34). Paul then concludes the letter with a curse for those who do not agree with his instructions: "Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord. Our Lord, come [*Maranatha*]!" (16:22). This is what is called a *voces mysticae*, or words belonging to the language of curse tablets and magical spells (Fotopoulos 2014). With the inclusion of *maranatha*, a word foreign to Greeks and Romans, Paul inserts into his threat the language of magic and casts a curse on those who do not follow his instructions. As someone who has made claims to ritual authority and having full access to the divine realm, Paul makes the claim that his ritual activity, here a curse, is indeed efficacious. Paul attempts to convince the community that the curse, and all the threats that come with it, will indeed come to pass if they disobey what he has laid out in the letter.

Having noted how scholars analyze 1 Corinthians 8–10 through the lens of ethnic and social status lenses, delineated a model of ritual that allows for certain questions to come to light in terms of ritual and the dynamics of ritual negotiation, and demonstrated how Paul makes authority claims throughout the letter, it is time to turn to 1 Corinthians 8–10. First, however, it should be noted that the bringing up of new questions does not always nullify old questions and their answers. In interpretive work, new paradigms and models, such as those being applied here, can highlight parts of the text, give new answers to old interpretative problems, and even bolster former conclusions rather than negate them. I argue here that ritual studies moves us beyond a simple trust in Paul and allows modern readers to see the text as a part of a dynamic, lived conversation by real people with all the messiness and debate that entails. This supplements, challenges, and shapes existing readings of the text while, hopefully, informing future ones.

Ritual negotiations and 1 Corinthians 8–10

In 1 Corinthians 8–10, Paul is addressing questions the Corinthians posed to him concerning food offered to idols (8:1). As elsewhere, Paul broaches the notion of

knowledge or wisdom, a theme that runs throughout the beginning of the letter, as he attempts to claim authoritative control of the Corinthian situation. He notes that "knowledge puffs up" (8:1–2). He also makes the claim that "anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge" (8:2). If we connect these claims to Paul's prior claims to knowledge, it seems that Paul contradicts himself. Perhaps here he only means what other people know and not himself. Given that he follows this statement with instructions of his own, he is clearly not referring to himself. Furthermore, Paul makes an appeal that "love" should win over any exercise of "knowledge" in the case of those who eat at idol temples (8:1). However, what Paul asks of those who know is far beyond acquiescing to some sort of theological compromise. For the Corinthians, this is not a purely religious matter in the sense of interacting with an idol (8:7, 9). Rather, it is inevitably social.

Regarding the social, I would like to return to Hüsken and Neubert's three processes in regard to ritual negotiation and failure: participation, subversion, and contextualization. Paul's central concern is the perception of the weak in regard to their understanding of ritual efficacy in idol temples. In other words, do the rituals surrounding sacrifice and the officiants over them actually function properly and who gets a say in which rituals succeed and which do not? If we are looking at each of the "voices" involved in the discussion, Paul and the "weak" stand on one side in agreement while the "knowledgeable" and those participating in meals with idol meat outside the Christian community stand on the other. The knowledgeable have decided that the rituals which involve meat sacrificed to idols have failed (8:4–6), while the weak hold that the meat is somehow altered, hence tainted, by the ritual and its specialists (8:7). Further, Paul agrees with the knowledgeable and yet asks them to concede to the weak's claims to ritual knowledge. However, Paul attempts to lay a different interpretation over the ritual in 10:20–22, claiming that those who know really do not know, since the idols are not gods but rather demons. This isolates the knowledgeable even more because they are not akin to their Greek and Roman counterparts but have done something else with the ritual that sets them apart for Paul. In this case, Paul takes up the position of the weak while setting up the knowledgeable with a rhetorical trap. Participation for the weak amounts to being a traitor to the identity of a Jesus follower. Participation for the knowledgeable does not amount to betraying Jesus, because they proclaim the inefficacy of the rituals involved in the preparation of sacrificial meat.

E. C. Still posits, based on papyri invitations, that some, if not many, invitations to dine with people outside the Jesus community are not connected to idolatry at all. In other words, there was no sacred or sacral ritual associated with a given meal if an invitation did not say so (Still 2002, 336). This possibility would clear Paul of any notion that he tolerated eating meat offered to idols, as 1 Cor 8:10 suggests. Yet, if this is the kind of dining under discussion in chapter 8, it makes no sense for Paul to ask the knowledgeable to abstain. Coutsoumpos follows a similar line of argument based on dinner invitations found among the Oxyrynchus Papyri:

> Apollonius requests you to dine at the table of the lord Sarapis on the occasion of the coming of age of his brother in the temple of Theoris.
>
> *(P.Oxy. 1755)*

> Diogenes invites you to dinner for the first birthday of his daughter in
> the Sarapeum tomorrow which is Pachon (? or 16) from the eighth onward.
> *(P.Oxy. 2791)*

Coutsoumpos makes the claim that, because some invitations were to events like
birthdays and the like, it was highly unlikely that meat sacrificed to idols was pre-
sent (Coutsoumpos 2005, 22–23). Yet, this claim is weak because it is an argument
from silence. Brief invitations are hardly an indicator of what is not involved in
said events.

Of the three groups negotiating about dining ritual in Corinth—with Paul
playing authority figure—only the weak appear to be aligned with Paul. Paul criti-
cizes the second group, the knowledgeable, as isolated and therefore in the wrong,
and he claims that the third group, the officiants at the local temples, are ignorant
about what we are doing. Behind the scene that Paul paints was the reality of three
groups in juxtaposition that had to negotiate the meaning of dining ritual; how
participation was to occur; and why a claim of ritual failure might be made. To the
knowledgeable, who participated in meals that included meat offered to idols, they
saw the rituals and those that conducted them as failing at their ritual task because,
in their eyes, nothing really happened. The idol meat was not contaminated to them
nor did eating it call into question their loyalty to Jesus.

Subversion enters when actors in the process of negotiation disagree and ques-
tion or change ritual perscriptions, ritual roles, and power relations. The weak had
evidently cast aspersions on the knowledgeable in this regard, noting that they took
part in forbidden rituals and therefore had betrayed the identity of the community.
In turn, the knowledgeable subvert the ritual context of Greek and Roman sac-
rifice and the dining connected with it by simply dismissing it. Paul counters that
the subversion of the knowledgeable is inappropriate because it causes rifts in the
community, harming the weak based on their understandings of the ritual (1 Cor.
8:9–13). Moreover, Paul sets up the knowledgeable when he, the one who claims
to have access to divine knowledge, claims that in fact the knowledgeable actu-
ally know nothing (10:20–22). Ritual specialists in Greek and Roman temples do
indeed sacrifice to something, but it is not the god to which they intend but rather
to demons. Paul claims ritual authority here, just like he does throughout the letter.
By claiming that the ritual specialists in Greek and Roman contexts do not know
what they are doing and thereby implicating the knowledgeable in the effective
outcome of the ritual, consorting with demons, Paul condemns Greek and Roman
practices along with anyone who participates in them. Paul acts as though he is the
preeminent ritual specialist, claiming that all who do other than what he says have
lost their identity in the Christ community.

This leads to Hüsken and Neubert's third part of ritual negotiation: contextu-
alization. While many studies have looked at the Jewish and Greek–Roman meal
contexts of the Corinthians, I would like to turn to the social implications of Paul
giving the knowledgeable no options, ritually speaking, at least in Paul's eyes. For
Paul, the knowledgeable either have to abandon their connections and identity with
the Christ community and become in league with demons or aquiesce to his

ritual authority and cut social ties with those who participate in what Paul consideres demonic ritual contexts. A quote from Isaeus illustrates what Paul is commanding the Corinthians to do:

> We also have other proofs that we are sons from the daughter of Kiron. For as is natural since we were male children of his own daughter, he never performed any sacrifice without us, but whether the sacrifices were great or small, we were always present and sacrificed with him … and we went to all the festivals with him. But when he sacrificed to Zeus Ktesios he was especially serious about the sacrificial rite, and he did not admit any slaves or free men who were not relatives but he performed all of the sacrificial rites himself. We shared in this sacrifice and we together with him handled the sacred meat and we put offerings on the altar with him and performed the other parts of the sacrifice with him.
>
> *(Isaeus 8.16; Stowers 2011, 130)*

Participation in sacrifice and sacrificial meals establishes and maintains familial ties and identities. In asking the Corinthians to abstain from idol meat, Paul does not simply ask the knowledgeable to avoid idolatry or contamination from such things. First, he asks them to trust him with ritual authority. They must accept his claims about right and wrong action and ritual failure. Second, if ritual is an indicator of identity, Paul is asking—commanding, really—the knowledgeable to distance themselves from familial activities and their ties to households outside of the Jesus group. For the knowledgeable, it was vitally important to continue such familial and patronal ties. So what Paul demanded of them amounted to social violence, an act that would cut them off from social, as well as material, resources (Taussig 2009, 169).

One other observation can be made about the ritual context of 1 Corinthians in regard to eating idol meat. While some of the Corinthians, the weak, were in agreement with Paul's order of abstinence from idol meat and those contexts, there was a decidedly bodily claim in the prohibition. As stated above, rituals are somatic. Food rituals are especially somatic because they involve the ingestion of food, giving a number of sensations to the senses. So what Paul asked of the knowledgeable was not simply a cognitive shift in perspective but rather a somatic shift that would place them outside the circles of people they knew and, perhaps, to whom they were very closely related. Here, Paul called for the splitting of families, friends, and patron–client relationships. There was a genuine violence embodied in Paul's demands that aimed at fealty to a new group, the Jesus group, at the expense of all other social ties. Couple these demands with Paul's insistence that those who wish to keep said ties had no place at the negotiating table and that, if they did not acquiesce to his requests, they were cursed (16:22). In response, one can imagine that many in the Corinthian community not only rejected Paul's authoritative maneuvers but also continued to innovate ritually in his absence. It is clear that Paul anticipated this reaction, since he spent time at the end of the letter, before issuing the curse in 16:22, noting that he was indeed going to visit and spend time with them (16:1–12). Some in the community may have seen this as a threat rather than as welcome news.

Conclusion

Paul's overall argument in 1 Corinthians 8–10 is based on his claim to authority and the ability to make demands of the Corinthian Jesus followers. Models from ritual studies, in this instance ritual negotiation, provide the interpreter with the means to help the reader see more clearly the messiness of life, as a burgeoning community sorted out its own ritual contexts and, by extension, its own ritual identity. Furthermore, interpretive questions surrounding rituals lead to a more nuanced understanding of Paul's relationship to his clients. Paul, generally understood to be an exemplar of faith and always correct, becomes a more complex figure when one takes into account the ritual context of the Corinthians and the fact that ritual is fluid in nature. Without Paul present, the community found it necessary to innovate and adjust to its own lived experiences. Within this context, groups with varying opinions about how that ought to operate in ritual contexts formed. Via the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul attempted to assert his authority in order to smooth out those group differences. It appears that Paul was not entirely successful in his efforts, if 2 Corinthians is any indication, and it is difficult to know how the other side of negotiations played itself out in the long run. What one can conclude is that ritual studies gives us new lenses through which to understand early Christian lives within their historical context. Also, the important questions that ritual studies prompt should no longer be ignored by the larger academic community.

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8

RITUAL TRANSGRESSION

Richard E. DeMaris

The chapters that open this book, those in Parts I and II, have shown how rituals facilitate interaction, whether with the divine realm or in human society. In the course of negotiating these interactions, rituals build bridges between worlds and enable both the defining and crossing of group boundaries. They are, in a nutshell, a kind of social glue that brings and knits individuals and groups together (Grimes 2011, 15). They do so by promoting cooperation and by expressing and sustaining group solidarity, and restoring it if it is lost.

Scholars who focus on how rituals operate and their role in the ordering of society—structural–functionalists—generally find in them a socially stabilizing force. This understanding of ritual goes back a hundred years to French sociologist Émile Durkheim, who saw ritual as the basis of communal life (Durkheim 2001 [1912], 258–59, 282–88; Stephenson 2015, 38–42; Uro 2016, 66–67, 128–31). More recently Roy Rappaport presented the perspective succinctly when he claimed that ritual is "the basic social act" and that it contains "the social contract itself" (1999, 138).

Rituals do not always create, display, and enhance social solidarity, however. They may be socially disruptive and destabilizing instead, especially when carried out by minority or marginalized groups. While publicly performing the Muslim call to prayer in Dubai or Damascus reflects and reinforces the social order, it has generated social conflict in Dortmund and Duisburg, Germany (Langer et al. 2011, 100–108). A same-sex wedding, depending on where it takes place, may affirm a cultural norm or challenge it (Lash 2012). Some scholars have even turned Durkheim on his head by insisting that social tension is inherent in ritual: "Ritual becomes the source of conflict precisely because it is ritual, an identity-forming activity and means of reproducing a group's values, social structures, and habitual properties" (Langer et al. 2011, 121).

In some cases, a group may intentionally sponsor and perform rituals that lead to social confrontation. For instance, the Vishva Hindu Parisad/Hindu World Federation (VHP) organized religious processions and pilgrimages throughout India in the 1980s to unite Hindu groups and draw attention to religious sites it claimed had been commandeered by non-Hindus. Focus fell on Ayodhya, a temple town in northern India, where a mosque purportedly sat on the site of a former temple to Ram (Rama), a popular Hindu deity. VHP's orchestration of mass rituals culminated in 1992 with the destruction of the mosque and building of a temple to Ram in its place (along with a protective wall around it) in the course of two days. Jan Platvoet sees in these events an example of a group cultivating rituals in order to mobilize allies and confront social opponents, in this case Muslims (Platvoet 1995). This example lends credence to the observation made by other scholars studying ritual conflict: "Contesting a ritual, as well as using a ritual to contest something else, are means of challenging authority, establishing agency, and negotiating power" (Langer et al. 2011, 121).

Ritual transgression, the subject of this chapter, entails conflict, contestation, and disputing identity. It belongs to the category of ritual conflict. Social context is crucial for determining when a ritual triggers conflict, as the examples of the Muslim call to prayer and same-sex wedding demonstrate. So, placing early Christian rituals in their social and historical contexts is essential for deciding when and how they were transgressive. Such contextualizing best begins with a ritual confrontation that took place in Judea in the second century BCE, as it had profound implications for Judea at the time of Jesus and for the earliest Christ followers.

Situating and defining ritual transgression

Late in the year 165 (or possibly164) BCE Judas Maccabeus along with his brothers and Judean followers repaired and refurbished the temple in Jerusalem and reinstated temple sacrifices to the god of Israel that had ceased several years earlier. The festivities around these events came to be known as Hanukkah, which became part of the Jewish festival calendar and is celebrated even today. The earliest sources for these events characterized the Maccabean action as more than simply rebuilding and redecorating a decayed temple and reinstituting its former rites. It also required purifying a defiled sacred place, removing an altar that been profaned, and constructing an altogether new altar that could be properly consecrated (1 Macc 4:36–58; 2 Macc 10:1–8).

What had happened to the temple that required more than its renovation? The answer revolves around Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Greek–Macedonian king, who began his rule of Mesopotamia and the Levant (including Judea) in 175 BCE. Antiochus, like his predecessors on the throne, encouraged the adoption of Greek culture as a way of uniting the various peoples and multiple ethnicities that constituted the Seleucid Empire, a successor to the enormous empire that Alexander the Great had created. Some Judean groups, especially among the Jerusalem elite, saw the advantage of cooperating with the king and established Greek institutions like

a gymnasium and reorganized Jerusalem politically as a Greek city (Wills 2008, 88; 1 Macc 1:14; 2 Macc 4:9–10). But Antiochus eventually resorted to more drastic action. Rather than allowing the Judeans to adopt Greek ways gradually, he imposed them and, at the same time, banned their existing ancestral customs and practices.

Judean texts recounting this intervention paint a grim picture (1 Macc 1:20–61; 2 Macc 5:15–6:11). Not only did Antiochus loot the Jerusalem temple and its treasury, he abolished the traditional offerings and sacrifices made there. He rededicated the temple to Olympian Zeus, offering as burnt sacrifices swine and other animals Judeans regarded as unclean. From the local viewpoint, he desecrated the altar and temple. The language of "the abomination that makes desolate," which one source used to describe these events, says it all (Dan 11:31). Antiochus also abolished other Judean practices like circumcision and Sabbath observance, threatening any who persisted in observing them with death. As a consequence, when Judas Maccabeus freed Jerusalem from Antiochus' control, he had to do more than refurbish the temple. He had to purify it.

What triggered these drastic actions on Antiochus' part and how best to characterize them are still debated by scholars (Grabbe 2000, 78–79; 1992, 247–56, 281–85). Surviving ancient sources labeled him eccentric (Polybius 26.1a; 26.1; Diodorus 29.32; Livy 41.20), contemptible (Dan 11:21), or sinful (1 Macc 1:10), but this hardly explains his dramatic shift in policy. Faced with an ongoing struggle with the Ptolemies, his Greek–Macedonian rivals who ruled nearby Egypt, and with rising Roman power, he needed a source of funds to support his army. Looting the Jerusalem temple and its treasury was a logical move. Once in control of the temple, he may have decided to accelerate the Hellenization of Judea that was already underway (Wills 2008, 89). It is also possible that he intervened in what amounted to a civil war between two pro-Greek Judean parties, and what was primarily a military suppression of rebellion included a clamp down on Judean religious customs and practices, that is, religious persecution (2 Macc 5:5–14; Honigman 2014, 3). The latter is certainly suggested in Judean accounts about him.

Whatever his motivation and however the actions he ordered are best described, Antiochus committed what this chapter will call ritual transgression. His interference with Judean ritual life had two aspects. He suppressed existing ritual practice at the Jerusalem temple as well as among the Judean population. This was a coerced or enforced noncompliance—transgression by failure to perform an established ritual. He also imposed a new set of rites that were transgressive in at least two ways. He redirected sacrifice away from the god of Israel to Olympian Zeus at a temple dedicated to the former, and he did so with animals, like swine, regarded as unclean or forbidden to Judeans. This form of sacrifice so deeply transgressed local norms that it required purification of the temple to counteract it.

Whether eliminating existing rites or imposing new (and in this case offensive) rites, Antiochus acted coercively. His was an assertion of power or control, and he may have felt, as colonial authorities typically do, that he was ridding a subject people of their inferior cultural practices. In contrast to these coercive examples, ritual transgression may also be voluntary. One may fail to conduct a ritual by

choice, by an act of nonparticipation. Three centuries after Antiochus, for example, the Christians of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) signaled their objection to established temple rites to the gods of Rome by neglecting to perform them (Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.97). Likewise, one may choose to perform altered rites that violate existing ritual patterns or offend existing cultural norms. A recent example is American football player Colin Kaepernick's sitting or kneeling—instead of standing—during the playing of the national anthem prior to games. He does so, he says, in order to protest the treatment of African-Americans in the United States (Borden 2016). In contrast to Antiochus' ritual transgression by imposition, there is transgression by voluntary noncompliance, as these two instances show.

These various examples provide an initial profile of ritual transgression and will serve as a roadmap for the rest of the chapter. Determining the motivation for ritual transgression, which would add depth to the profile, will follow, after a survey of early Christian ritual transgression in its cultural context.

Whether voluntary or coerced, ritual transgression, especially involving taboo breaking, predictably triggers outrage and a ferocious reaction. Condemnation of Kaepernick has been widespread and vocal. In the case of Antiochus, it was certainly more than ritual transgression that sparked the Judean uprising against him known as the Maccabean revolt. He looted the Jerusalem temple, destroyed parts of the city, and slaughtered the population. Nevertheless, some Judean sources present the banning of ancestral rituals and imposition of foreign ones, that is, forced participation in sacrifice to gods other than the god of Israel, as *the* events that triggered the rebellion against him (1 Macc 2:15–28; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.268–272).

Particularly striking is the fierce resistance exhibited by a Judean scribe named Eleazar and seven unnamed brothers and their mother, presented in a narrative of questionable historicity (2 Macc 6:18–7:42). Even more fictional is a later (and much longer) version in 4 Maccabees, in which Eleazar and the family become models of the Greek virtues in resisting Antiochus (5:1–18:24). The pivotal moment in these accounts comes when Antiochus' agents force Eleazar and the family to participate *fully* in the sacrifice to alien gods by having them eat sacrificial flesh, namely pork, which is forbidden according to their ancestral dietary law. The report in 4 Maccabees mentions both pork and food sacrificed to idols (*eidōlothytos*) as objectionable. They refuse to do so even under severe torture, and the enraged agents eventually put them all to death.

In this instance, ritual transgression, the forced eating of forbidden food, did not actually take place. Nonetheless, indignation was still the result. A contemporary example of this is the widespread protest that erupted in the Muslim world when an obscure Christian pastor in rural Florida announced plans for burning 200 copies of the Qur'an on September 11, 2010 (Ahmed 2010). While burning a Qur'an can be an acceptable and dignified way of disposing of it (Eulich 2012), for an attention-seeking Islamophobe to do so, especially on the date he proposed, would have been a transgressive version of a disposal rite. It did not matter that he did not actually carry out the burning as planned. The mere threat of it was enough to generate a powerful reaction.

The stories of heroic death in 2 and 4 Maccabees may have limited historical reliability, but they reveal much about how the Judean scribes who wrote them sought to convey the impact of Antiochus' violent intervention in Judea. Played out on Eleazar's and the family's bodies was the same brutality he showed the local populace when he put down the Judean uprising, but now that intervention found vivid expression at the individual level. Eleazar and the family were metaphors for Judea as a whole. Why did the scribal imagination take this direction? A symbolic understanding of the body, anthropologist Mary Douglas maintains, is typical of human cultures: "the human body is always treated as an image of society" (1970, 70). This was the instinct behind the ancient authors' decision to cast their narratives about Antiochus' intervention in personal and corporeal terms.

The focal point of the brutal encounter between both Eleazar and the family and Antiochus' agents was not their torture and deaths but their refusal to ingest sacrificial meat they regard as unclean. Why did the narrative turn on what crossed or rather *might* have crossed their lips? Why was this the pivotal instant and not their gruesome deaths? Again, Mary Douglas is an insightful guide. The mouth is one of several entries into the body, and attention to it or other bodily orifices signals a concern about external boundaries. Douglas notes that "Interest in [the body's] apertures depends on the preoccupation with social exits and entrances, escape routes and invasions" (1970, 70; see also Douglas 1966, 121–23). If concern about bodily boundaries and the crossing of them reflects a larger concern about social boundaries—in this case the boundaries of the Judean body politic or people— then the cause of such preoccupation is clear: Antiochus' intervention or invasion of Judea.

Yet Antiochus' was only the latest in a string of incursions into Judea. From the sixth century BCE on, Judea endured invasion, deportation or exile, and domination by larger, more powerful neighbors: first the Babylonians followed by the Persians. Then came Alexander and his successors, who were but another in a series of colonial powers that controlled Judea. Prior to this, Judea and the larger entity to which it belonged, Israel, had enjoyed relative independence. An army protected its borders; it was governed by kings; a monumental temple housed a well-developed cult. But that was a distant memory by the time of Antiochus:

> The political, geographical, and religious boundaries that typified pre-exilic life were no longer fixed. Whatever infrastructures held communities together previously were no longer available: indigenous monarchy was a thing of the past, and the land was … a post-collapse society.
>
> *(Eskenazi 2014, 231)*

There were Judeans but no longer a Judea, except as a province in an empire ruled by non-Judeans.

Shorn of borders, a king, and a temple, Judeans had to establish their identity in new ways or face extinction as a distinct ethnic group. The Persian rulers allowed the Judeans to rebuild the Jerusalem temple, and scholars consequently use the term

second-temple period to refer to Judea under foreign domination. But other "criteria of unity and cohesion," as Tamara Eskenazi calls these identity markers, had to be devised (2014, 231). A lack of geographical borders and the loss of social institutions to define the people clearly generated insecurity among Judeans, prompting a preoccupation with boundaries and thus a concern about what crossed the body's oral boundary.

What were these new identity markers that would define Judeans and set them apart from other ethnic groups? Marking the (male) body in the ritual of circumcision became important in this period, as did Sabbath observance and participation in a series of festivals, Passover prominent among them. The Torah or first five books of what would become the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament were reaching their final form and gaining authority at this time, and they provided guidance about such rites (Neh 8–13; Grabbe 2000, 294–95; Sandgren 2010, 183). Marriage within the ethnic group (endogamy), as opposed to mixed marriage (exogamy), arose as a defensive strategy to preserve Judean identity (Ezra 9–10). A distinctive diet, normed by the Torah and concerns about ritual purity, also came into prominence, as the opening of this chapter underscores (Brumberg-Kraus, Marks, and Rosenblum 2014, 23). Deuteronomy 11 detailed what foods were clean and unclean.

The importance of diet is evident in the literature. Judean writings from this period present the reader with exemplary protagonists who, in whatever situation they found themselves, exercised extreme caution about what they ate. Often the stories were set in an imagined past, much earlier than their date of composition:

- Daniel's high status in the Babylonian court entitled him to royal rations of food and wine, but he feared defilement from the king's fare and opted instead for a diet of vegetables and water (Daniel 1:3–16).
- The virtuous Tobit married within his (extended) family and refused to eat the food of the Gentiles (non-Judeans) when he was forced into captivity in Assyria (Tobit 1:9–11).
- The widow Judith exploited her beauty by insinuating herself into the camp of an enemy general named Holofernes. When he attempted to seduce her by plying her with food and drink, she turned the tables and beheaded him. Before journeying to her enemy's camp, she packed her own food and wine, so as to avoid the offence of consuming Holofernes' delicacies and wine (Jdt 10:5; 12:1–2, 9, 19).
- Second Maccabees reports that the hero of the revolt against Antiochus, Judas Maccabeus, fled Jerusalem when the temple was desecrated not simply to avoid capture: "But Judas Maccabeus, with about nine others, got away to the wilderness … they continued to live on what grew wild, so that they might not share in the defilement" (5:27).

Judeans were negotiating their identity by what they did and did not eat; adherence to a particular diet became a key mark of distinction in the second temple period.

A preoccupation with diet was sometimes paired with concern about one's dining companions (Rosenblum 2010, 36–45). Dining was (and is) a social event, so this linkage was predictable. Some Judean writers expressed fear of pollution not only from unclean food but also from eating with unsavory characters. In articulating why restricting one's diet to clean animals was reasonable, the Letter of Aristeas opined that god imposed strict dietary observances in order to shield Judeans from being perverted by others (142–71). An exclusive diet would keep Judeans from joining non-Judeans at their tables and perhaps vice versa. But why would sharing a table with a non-Judean taint the Judean diner? Another second-temple writing, Jubilees, recommends such disassociation and offers a rationale:

> separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs. Because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable. They slaughter their sacrifices to the dead, and to the demons they bow down. And they eat in tombs.
>
> *(22:16–17)*

Ethical, religious, ritual, and dietary matters become intertwined in this justification. Inappropriate or improperly prepared food, misdirected sacrifices (meat offered to idols), or consuming food in places considered to be polluting may be at issue here—perhaps all three. Indiscriminate dining was evidently thought to open the door to all manner of impurity and corruption.

Early Christian dietary and dining transgressions

Passage after passage in early Christian writings focuses on who dines with whom, what one can eat, Sabbath observance, and circumcision. Yet rather than confirming the second temple period consensus about such issues as definitive for Judean identity, these passages do quite the opposite. For example, in the earliest extant account of Jesus' life, the Gospel of Mark, controversy about these very matters swirls around him. The Pharisees, a Judean party recognized for their piety, take issue with Jesus for dining indiscriminately—with sinners and tax collectors (Mark 2:15–17). Later in the same account, Jesus' disciples are caught working (harvesting) instead of resting (as prescribed) on the Sabbath, and when Jesus defends their action, his justification includes a story about violating food restrictions (Mark 2:23–30; Collins 2014). Controversy over Sabbath observance returns shortly thereafter, when Jesus heals a person in need (Mark 3:3–6). Because these violations—all ritual transgressions—involve agreed-upon markers of Judean identity, they trigger an outrage that the gospel writer presents as the impetus for the plot against Jesus that results in his execution.

Of all these Judean identity markers, what one ate (or might eat) and with whom one ate commanded the most attention. They appear in one of the earliest New

Testament documents, in which the apostle Paul responded to a query from the Christ followers in Corinth about the eating of food, probably meat, that was previously part of a sacrifice to a god or gods other than the god of Israel (*eidōlothytos*; 1 Corinthians 8:1). This was the kind of meat that Eleazar and the family of 4 Maccabees refused. Paul allowed it, however, at least in principle: he reasoned that since the idols one sacrificed to represented gods that did not actually exist, eating food offered to them posed no problem (1 Cor 8:4–6). Yet Paul was aware that such eating was very troubling to some at Corinth—no doubt followers of Judean extraction—so he ultimately recommended against doing so. At least, he himself would not eat meat that had been sacrificed.

Where one ate food offered to idols and what it implied came up as a related issue in Paul's response, and he expressed concern about eating with others in a temple dedicated to a god other than the god of Israel (1 Cor 8:10). Reminiscent of the way Jubilees combined eating the wrong food and eating with the wrong people—non-Judeans—Paul cautioned the Corinthians about sharing a table with those who worshipped what amounted to false gods or demons. Shared eating or commensality implied a mutuality or partnership with nonbelievers that compromised one's allegiance to Christ (1 Cor 10:18–22).

While in the end Paul seemed to abide by Judean food and dining prescriptions, the situation he addressed at Corinth reveals that consensus about this matter was lacking among Corinthian believers. Some of them had abandoned Judean food restrictions or did not abide by them. Their rationale for doing is reflected in what Paul wrote (1 Cor 8:4–6). And this is not an isolated instance of dietary transgression, for Paul returned to the matter later. Toward the end of his letter to Christ followers in Rome, the issue of dietary restrictions and Sabbath observance appear. Paul did not know the Roman assemblies or house churches personally, but he knew the controversies that had plagued other churches, and these were evidently two of them. There were those who did not consider Judean identity markers relevant, and thus violated dietary and Sabbath restrictions: "Some believe in eating anything" (Rom 14:1); "Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike" (14:5). Again, in principle Paul agreed with those who found all foods acceptable: "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself" (14:14). But for the sake of community harmony he wanted to accommodate those who found some foods unclean, as he had done with the Corinthians.

Contestation over food continued long after Paul. In letters attributed to Paul, but clearly from a later period, readers or listeners are instructed not to let anyone condemn them "in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths (Col 2:16)." Another post-Pauline letter condemns those who would "demand abstinence from foods … For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected" (1 Tim 4:3–4). For the communities reflected in these letters, dietary transgression was evidently no longer an issue. Yet in documents from the same period, dietary restrictions were still in force, and violating them brought condemnation. The author of Revelation, for instance, rebukes certain Christ followers in Pergamum and Thyatira for eating food sacrificed to idols (2:14, 20),

and the early Christian writing called the Didache forbids the practice (6:3). The controversy stirred by transgressing Judean dietary practices lived for several generations after Paul.

Contestation over food and dining likely went back to Jesus, as the earlier examples from the Gospel of Mark indicate. Though Mark and the other gospels were written well after the time of Jesus, their reports about Jesus' associating and dining indiscriminately with others—the practice of open commensality—are historically reliable. Less historically certain are reports that present Jesus totally at odds with the Judean purity system (Wassen 2016). These could just as easily reflect later disputes between Christ followers and other Judean groups like the Pharisees. Mark ascribes a pronouncement to Jesus that suggests he sought to redefine the basis of Judean purity, or at least critique it, not overturn it: "there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile" (7:15) This saying is rephrased a few lines later: "Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from the outside cannot defile, since it enters, not heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (7:18b–19b). But the parenthetical comment that follows concludes that Jesus eliminated all food restrictions: "(Thus he declared all foods clean)" (7:19b). If this interpretation of the saying, likely coming from a later time, was in force among Christ followers in the generations after Jesus, it meant their dining ritual transgressed Judean dietary prescriptions.

An even more defining moment appears in the Acts of the Apostles, the earliest extant writing about the development of the movement around Jesus after his death. Acts reports that Peter, a disciple of Jesus and leader of the movement, had a vision in which a large sheet containing all manner of livings creatures dropped down from heaven. A voice instructed Peter to kill and eat them, but he refused: "'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean'" (Acts 10:14). But the divine voice is insistent: "'What God has made clean, you must not call profane'" (10:15). Peter's resistance reflects the Judean perspective on diet: there are clean and unclean animals, and the latter are off limits. But the narrative provides divine authorization for transgressing this distinction.

This vision episode (10:9–16) is artfully inserted in the story of Cornelius, a non-Judean, who had been instructed by a vision of his own to seek out Peter and listen to his proclamation (10:1–8 and 10:17–48). Messengers from Cornelius found Peter and invited him to return with them to Cornelius, which he did. Peter agreed to visit Cornelius' household because of his divine vision; as he said to the gathered household,

> You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew [Judean] to associate with or to visit a Gentile [non-Judean]; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection.
> *(10:28–29)*

With these words Peter linked the indiscriminate eating encouraged by his vision with indiscriminate association, which opened the door to recruiting non-Judeans

to the circle of Christ followers. Accordingly, Peter preached to Cornelius in the narrative that follows, and he and his household became believers. A Judean logic is at work in these intertwined accounts: indiscriminate eating implies indiscriminate association and the reverse. At the same time, Judean sensibilities are offended when Peter embraces both transgressive eating and fellowship.

The narrative that follows underscores the offense that Peter's actions generated among followers of Jesus, who in the early years were exclusively or at least largely Judean. When Peter reported the results of his encounter with Cornelius to the circle of followers in Jerusalem, those among them who were circumcised objected: "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" (11:3). This is a fitting question from a Judean viewpoint. Peter's transgressive dining destabilized a foundation stone of Judean identity. Indignation was understandable.

Peter recounted his vision in response. In fact, he summarized the entire story about Cornelius, and doing so proved sufficient to silence those who objected to his indiscriminate dining (Acts 11:1–18). Yet the debate over what one ate, and with whom, was not so easily settled, as the evidence presented indicates. The matter may not even have been settled for Peter, whom Acts presents as having been persuaded by the divine mandate to transgress food and dining restrictions. In a report much closer to Peter's time than Acts, he seems to vacillate. The report from Paul makes him look two-faced. In Galatians he writes,

> But when Cephas [another name for Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles [non-Judeans]. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.
>
> *(Gal 2:11–12)*

Whatever one decides about the accuracy of this report—Paul was not a neutral observer—it confirms that what one ate and with whom one ate were matters of intense debate among the early Christians. The simple rituals of eating and sharing a table with others, if done in ways that transgressed accepted patterns, could and evidently did generate heated controversy, both within circles of Christ followers and between Christ followers and their fellow Judeans.

What emerges from the literary record of the early Christ followers is a continuum that ranged from continued observance of Judean dietary and dining practices to the complete abandonment of them. Paul appears sympathetic to both ends of the spectrum and found himself trying to mediate between the two. Whether his mediation was successful or not is unknown. In the case of another movement leader, Peter, there are two portraits of him: one in which he is divinely authorized to transgress Judean dietary practices and share a table with non-Judeans; and another in which he waffles between compliance with, and violation of, Judean dietary and dining practices. Widening the spectrum further is the Gospel of John, which this chapter will turn to in its closing pages. There Jesus is presented

commanding the violation not just of Judean dietary prohibition, in this case consuming blood (Lev 17:10–12; Cahill 2002), but also of the most basic taboo against eating human flesh (John 6:51–59).

What motivates ritual transgression?

Given the intense indignation and resistance that ritual transgression generated, why would individuals and groups engage in it? Answering that question will add essential detail to the portrait of ritual transgression that has emerged so far. In the example of Antiochus, explored at the beginning of this chapter, his banning of Judean ancestral ritual and imposition of non-native rituals was an assertion of his power and control of Judea. At the same time, since social identity is inscribed and expressed through ritual, Antiochus' imposition of ritual reflective of Greek culture may have been a heavy-handed attempt at Hellenizing a subject people.

Whatever his motive, this example of ritual transgression is rather different from most of the examples presented in this chapter so far, which reflect situations in which individuals or groups are not at the pinnacle of society but farther down the social order. Of particular interest are individuals or groups belonging to or constituting minority or fringe movements, because that was the social location of early Christians, whether in Judea or Roman cities. In their situation—again, unlike Antiochus'—it was not a matter of imposed ritual transgression, hence imposed identity, but rather intentional or voluntary ritual transgression. In line with the earlier observation that ritual is "an identity-forming activity" and that contesting ritual is a "means of challenging authority" (Langer et al. 2011:121), this chapter proposes that the goal of ritual transgression was (and is) either (1) to challenge existing ritual conventions and the identity or identities they support or (2) to forge and assert a new identity. In some cases, a mixture of the two aims may be at work. Several analogies to early Christian ritual transgression are worth considering as way of gauging the mixture.

Contemporary American Satanism: the Satanic Temple

Challenging existing ritual convention and belittling the attendant religious identity seems to be the primary point of contemporary performances of the Black Mass or Satanic Mass by self-identified Satanists, especially when they are publicized. While the Black Mass may be largely a literary invention or even churchly propaganda designed to stigmatize aberrant parishioners, there is consensus that it follows the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Mass but parodies it by inverting or distorting its components and features in certain ways: (1) prayers go to Satan or demons rather than God; (2) the cross or crucifix, if it is included in the ritual, is inverted; (3) the traditional elements of bread and wine are replaced by urine, feces, the blood of an infant or aborted fetus, or other repellant substances; (4) if the Satanists can obtain a consecrated host, it is defiled in the course of the ritual; (5) a naked woman serves as the altar; and (6) in order to confront and undo the repressed sexuality Satanists

attribute to Christianity, the language and bodily movements of both officiates and celebrants are intentionally lascivious (LaVey 1969, 99–105; Lewis 2001, 27–29; Urban 2006, 208). The possible inversions and perversions are endless, but they all serve to mock and desecrate the traditional Roman Catholic Mass and thus offend the practitioners and custodians of it.

The Black Mass may serve other purposes as well. It may celebrate hedonism, carnality, sexuality, and the obscene (Faxneld and Petersen 2014). Medieval and early modern accounts suggest that it was used for occult or magical purposes, though such reports may be largely or entirely legendary (e.g., Introvigne 2016, 35–43; Somerset 2004). The twentieth-century occultist and self-described magician Aleister Crowley found in the Eucharistic transformation of bread and wine into Christ's body and blood an alchemical force that could be used for cursing or enchanting people (Crowley 1976 [1929], 179–89). Still, Crowley devoted very little attention to the Black Mass in his massive study of magic—he preferred the term magick—and American Satanist Anton LaVey did not consider the Black Mass a part of Satanic ritual (LaVey 1969, 100). Contemporary performances of it are aimed primarily at offending conventional sensibilities more than anything else (Urban 2006, 191–221).

A case in point is the Black Mass that was to take place on the Harvard University campus in spring 2014. It not only stirred intense controversy on campus and attracted broad media attention but also prompted vocal opposition from local Roman Catholic officials. The sponsoring organization, the Cultural Studies Club of the Harvard Extension School, had sought to recognize little-known or minority religions by inviting groups to make presentations on campus. There was to be a Shinto tea ceremony, a Buddhist presentation on meditation, and an exhibit on the Shakers. The Satanic Temple also agreed to conduct a Black Mass (Introvigne 2016, 550–54). Public reaction to this last presentation was vocal and fierce, both on and off campus. The club defended its decision to sponsor a Black Mass on the grounds of inclusivity and free speech. University president Drew G. Faust, who felt compelled to involve her office, weighed in with a letter condemning the enactment of the Black Mass as abhorrent but permitting it as an act of free expression (Faust 2014). Catholic officials countered with a call to ban the event. Father Roger Landry of the Diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts, began his letter to President Faust bluntly: "I am writing to ask you to use your office to intervene to shut down the terribly ill-advised and totally insensitive Satanic Mass" (Landry 2014). The Archdiocese of Boston chimed in as well, stating its strong opposition to the staging of a Black Mass on the Harvard campus.

The Cultural Studies Club eventually reconsidered and withdrew its sponsorship of the mass. It was held off campus instead on the second floor of a Chinese restaurant in Cambridge's Harvard Square. About fifty people attended. On the same night, the archdiocese held a Eucharistic procession from the MIT chapel to St. Paul's Catholic Church near the Harvard campus, where a Eucharistic Holy Hour and Benediction took place. Fifteen hundred attended, including President Faust (Delwiche and Patel 2014).

The *Boston Globe*, the BBC, and other media analyzed the controversy in the days that followed and offered assessments of what motivated the Satanic Temple. The editors of the *Boston Globe* opined that the Satanists had baited the public and the Roman Catholic church in particular in hopes of eliciting an angry response and attracting attention to themselves (Editors of the *Boston Globe* 2014). BBC's Anthony Zurcher pointed out that the Satanic Temple had been behind the plan to erect a statue of Baphomet, a goat-headed deity, next to the statue of the Ten Commandments at the Oklahoma state capitol—obviously a sensationalist ploy (Zurcher 2014). These analyses focused more on the reaction to the Black Mass than the actual performance of it, and suggest that the Satanic Temple's primary objective was to ridicule a conventional ritual, the Roman Catholic mass, and provoke the religious institution behind it. Confirmation that the Temple's aim is social provocation comes from another ritual it has sponsored: it has conducted so-called Pink Masses at the family graves of anti-gay Christian extremists, claiming that the ritual sexually reorients the deceased in the afterlife (Jauregui 2013).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the nineteenth century

On the other end of the motivation scale is ritual transgression deployed and utilized to assert and forge a new identity. This is the case with plural marriage and the cluster of rituals connected with it in the early Mormon tradition. In the opening decades of the nineteenth century, British and North American Christianity underwent a vigorous religious revitalization that came to be known as the second great awakening. Along with boosting church affiliation and attendance, it fostered social movements like abolitionism and groups distinguished by reformist impulses. These groups drew from various sources—Christian millenarianism, the Enlightenment, and the idiosyncratic thinking of their charismatic founder(s)—to create communities that were utopian and communalist in orientation. They freely experimented with interpersonal relations at all levels. For instance, the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, better known as the Shakers, began in the eighteenth century but reached their peak of popularity on American soil in the mid–nineteenth century. They lived collectively in settlements, embraced pacifism, empowered female leaders, and practiced celibacy (Foster 1981, 21–71).

Another group, the Oneida Community, motivated by founder John Humphrey Noyes' belief in human perfectibility, gave up traditional households and private property in interest of an ideal communal life. Community members shed monogamous marriage and took up group or "complex" marriage, a system with multiple partners, which detractors condemned as "free love" (Kephart and Zellner 1994, 74–82; Kern 1981, 207–79). Both the Oneida Community and the Shakers (and many others) took their inspiration from the portrayal of the early church in the Acts of the Apostles as a group that pooled the resources of all its members (2:43–47; 4:32), and they took seriously the words attributed to Jesus about the next world: "'For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage,

but are like angels in heaven'" (Matt 22:30). If the next world did not include traditional marriage arrangements, then they were inappropriate in this life as well (Foster 1981, 72–122).

The enthusiasm of the second great awakening also fueled the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, better known as Mormonism, and its founder, Joseph Smith, Jr. Matthew 22:30 was a key verse for Smith as well, but he took the verse in a rather different direction from his contemporaries, finding in it support for yet another experiment in family arrangements, namely plural marriage or polygamy. The ideal existence for Smith, like those in the movements just noted, was communal. He pictured the heavens populated by families whose members had been bound together by eternally valid rites. These he called sealings or ordinances, and they could reunite the living and the dead in this existence and guarantee their fellowship in the next. Smith and his followers believed that he had been specially chosen to introduce and perform such rites in the last days of human existence—the latter days. Ordinary weddings were deficient because the marriages they enacted ended at death; they lacked validity because Smith or other Mormon authorities had not performed them. True or restored marriage was for time and eternity, and only Smith and other duly authorized Saints could properly seal civil marriages in this life and eternal or celestial marriages for the next life. The latter were not only the ideal, they were "crucial for one's place in the hereafter" (Daynes 2001, 4). For without the eternal ties to family that celestial marriage and allied sealings created, the glories of the afterlife could not be fully realized. Since, according to Jesus, there were no weddings in the afterlife, it was crucial to establish permanent wedding bonds in the here and now (Bergera 2002).

How exactly did plural marriage or polygamy figure in all this (Foster 1981, 123–80)? Smith claimed to have received a definitive revelation about the eternity of marriage on July 12, 1843 (Smith 1903 [1830], §132 [pp. 463–74]). In that same message god answered his query about the polygamy (more accurately polygyny) practiced by the patriarchs of the Old Testament: Abraham, David, and others. Just as god had given them many wives and numerous offspring, Smith would likewise be blessed: "I [God] will bless him and multiply him and give unto him an hundred-fold in this world, of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, houses and lands, wives and children, and crowns of eternal lives in the eternal worlds" (§132.55). As this last clause indicates, expanding family and family ties gave participants in plural marriage an elevated status in heaven, what Smith called exaltation, that made them godlike (§132.19–20). Smith's thinking essentially linked marriage and family with his theology of salvation and the afterlife (Kern 1981, 144–57; Daynes 2001, 4–5).

The revelation of 1843 validated practices that Smith had already been engaged in for a decade (Brooke 1994, 209–34). In Kirtland, Ohio, where the Latter-Day Saints had established themselves after fleeing persecution in upstate New York, Smith defied local authorities by performing weddings without a license on the grounds that all existing civil marriages were invalid without his authorization. In Ohio also began a series of marriages between Smith and his female followers, so that by July 1843 Smith's wives numbered about two dozen (Compton 1997, 2–8). While plural marriage was offensive to many in and outside the movement,

including Smith's first wife, Emma, it and other sealing rituals introduced in the early 1840s had their appeal. Baptism for the dead or proxy baptism allowed Mormons to bring deceased ancestors into the church and thus guarantee familial continuity in the afterlife. Proxy marriage allowed living Mormons to reconnect with their deceased spouse or spouses. Parents could be sealed to their children. Plural marriage established inter-family bonds. And, as noted above, celestial marriage promised that these ties would endure into the next life. Smith's followers, those that trekked to the Salt Lake valley after his death, institutionalized these rituals, most of which have survived to today (Bergera 2002; Daynes 2001, 25–27).

It is difficult to picture the exact protocols of these various rites, with living individuals standing in for the deceased and the same person groom or bride to several others, all the more so because a secrecy attended these proceedings from the beginning and attends them still. That these rites violated the conventions of the day, however, was clear. Such ritual transgression was denounced by some within the movement, and it attracted the attention of, and triggered alarm in, non-Mormon neighbors. While it did not play a major role in prompting the persecution that drove the Mormons westward from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the isolation of what became the Utah Territory, it did provoke later confrontations between Mormons and non-Mormons and eventually prompted the intervention of the federal government (Daynes 2001, 35–36). Such ritual transgression, especially plural marriage and the polygamy it propagated, was *the* key identity marker of Mormons in the nineteenth century, among Mormons and non-Mormons alike.

Unlike the Satanic Temple, Joseph Smith and his followers did not adopt the practice of plural marriage simply to provoke their non-Mormon neighbors. The ritual transgression that plural marriage entailed, while it did challenge existing practices and norms, was part of Smith's reformulation of Christianity. The novel practice was a way of framing a new identity and setting that identity off from that of non-Mormons. As such, Mormon ritual transgression was very much like that of the earliest Christ followers. Their indiscriminate table fellowship and diet distinguished them from their fellow Judeans. By engaging in transgressive dining, the early Christians were challenging the existing consensus about what marked a person as Judean. They were essentially redefining Judean identity.

As for what fostered such ritual transgression, the first Mormons and first Christians had much in common. The Latter-Day Saints, as their name implied, had an eschatological or millenarian outlook, identifying Joseph Smith as an end-time prophet bringing new revelation to prepare true believers for the Kingdom of God. This was understood variously as the restoration of an ideal past or the ingathering of believers to Zion (Underwood 1993). The approaching new age justified a radical break with the status quo, and it was incumbent upon believers to live in a way that anticipated the ideal, restored state. Likewise with the early Christ followers. There is broad scholarly consensus that an eschatological and millenarian orientation was behind much of their theology. They likely thought that their dining should mimic the great banquet promised at the culmination of human history, to which God would invite *all peoples*—quite indiscriminately (Isa 25:6–9).

The Islamic State

A millenarian orientation has also motivated the Islamic State, along with a strong impulse to reform Islam and return it to its perceived origins—the restoration of an idealized past. While ISIS bears the marks of a political enterprise, with the apparatus of a modern state bent on territorial expansion, it is also a religious movement (Wood 2017, 72–81). Literalist in its interpretation of the Qur'an, embracing violence as a way to purify Islam, it qualifies as a militant version of Salafism. Added to this Salafi worldview are elements from the millenarian stream of Islam, which goes back to its beginning (Cook 2002, 2). Islamic eschatology has blossomed in the last quarter century (Filiu 2011). Islamic State leaders articulate and subscribe to an end-time scenario (Cook 2002, 4–24; Cook 2005, 39, 151; McCants 2015): As the world approaches the final judgment, true Muslim warriors, i.e., ISIS fighters, are battling the secular western states, who are in league with the Antichrist (*Dajjāl*). Until 2016, when it was captured by anti-ISIS forces, Islamic State authorities located the final battle between good and evil, the biblical Armageddon, in the town of Dabiq, Syria. *Dabiq* was also the name of ISIS's polished online magazine at the time, designed to spread its perspective and draw recruits (Wood 2017, 62).

Islamic State leaders reject modern interpretations of Islam that prohibit slavery and rely on pre-modern Islamic legislation on war and its consequences. Leaders recognize that militant jihad will produce prisoners of war who can be disposed of in four ways: execution, manumission, ransom, or enslavement (Wood 2017, 20). Options one and four were applied to the Yazidi ethnic group in 2014 when ISIS swept into northern Iraq. Since ISIS fighters regarded the Yazidi as Satan worshippers, they showed the Yazidi no quarter. They executed the ethnic group's males and enslaved the females, who now serve as sex slaves of ISIS fighters (McCants 2015, 111–14).

The western press has seized on this vicious mistreatment of women as another example of the Islamic State's barbaric behavior, though it is important to remember that violent exploitation of women is hardly unique to this group. ISIS authorities have justified their actions by arguing that enslavement of captive women adheres to Islamic practice. Moreover, the act of rape itself has been interpreted as a form of devotion (*ibadah*)—of prayer or worship (Callimachi 2015).

Rape as prayer or worship?! That this is ritual transgression there can be no doubt. Devotional rape violates every Islamic notion of what constitutes devotion or worship (Wiegers 2004). What motivates ISIS adherents, however, is less clear, although male control of the female body clearly plays a role. That ISIS offends both Muslim and western sensibilities is obvious in many things its adherents say and do, but it is possible that devotional rape is more than pure provocation. If ISIS is considered as a new religious movement—this is one way of evaluating what is arguably a hybrid phenomenon—devotional rape may belong to a cluster of rituals defining a new religious identity. It may not just be another intentional provocation or simply the brutal mistreatment of a despised enemy.

Taboo violation and identity creation

Less uncertainty about motivation attends the most shocking understanding of dining among the first Christians, namely that in Eucharistic dining participants drank the blood and ate the flesh of their leader, Jesus. In the several narratives about his last meal with the disciples, Jesus identifies the bread and wine as his body and blood and he commands that they be consumed (Mark 14:22–25; Matt 26:26–29; Luke 22:14–23). While the phrases "this is my body" and "this is my blood" can be (and have been) understood symbolically or metaphorically, the Gospel of John's version of this language is more graphic and literal (Kobel 2011, 251–70):

> The Jews [Judeans] then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink."
>
> *(John 6:52–55)*

The rhetorical question that begins this quotation suggests that whoever presented Jesus in this way meant to confront and provoke. Yet taboo breaking can also reflect the assertion of a new identity (Harrill 2008, 136). When Joseph Smith linked plural marriage to salvation, he made a transgressive ritual central to Mormon identity. So, too, with earliest Christianity. If consuming Jesus was necessary for salvation, as this passage indicates, then transgressive dining was an essential part of an emerging Christian identity. This link between eating and eternal life marked the beginning of the theologizing around the meal that made it definitive for later generations of Christians. What is not to be overlooked, however, is how flagrantly transgressive this form of dining was. It was one thing to break Judean dietary law by consuming forbidden food, idol meat, or blood. But the Johannine Jesus insisted on something even more scandalous. Eucharist, according to the Gospel of John, is cannibalism (Theissen 1999, 136–37).

Even though the Johannine Jesus commanded it, Jesus' followers did not eat him for dinner. Yet, this kind of rhetoric, even if it did not spread widely, may have attracted attention. In several cases explored in this chapter, a transgressive ritual did not have to be carried out in order for it to trigger alarm. The very threat of conducting a mass Qur'an burning or carrying out a Black Mass is enough to trigger public outrage and to stigmatize the instigators. In the case of early Christianity, by the second century CE defenders of it were facing a host of accusations: debauchery, incest, child sacrifice, and cannibalism (Justin, 1 *Apol.* 26; 2 *Apol.* 12; Tatian, *Or. Graec.* 25; Theophilus, *Antol.* 3.4, 15; Tertullian, *Apol.* 7–8; *Nat.* 1.7, 15; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 9). While most of these charges can be dismissed as fabrications concocted to demonize an unpopular and legally prohibited group (McGowan 1994), which Christianity was at the time, the charge of cannibalism may not have been

groundless. For the mere whiff of ritual transgression, as this chapter has shown, carries a long way.

Conclusion

Anthropologist Mary Douglas has written that, "Probably all movements of religious renewal have had in common the rejection of external forms" (1970, 52), and embryonic Christianity was no exception. This rejection came to expression variously. Constructively it meant that the earliest Christ followers freely modified existing ritual forms and developed altogether new rituals, as Chapter 9 will show. On the negative or adversarial side, it meant their violating accepted ritual patterns, along with the cultural norms supporting them, or simply not participating in them. Such violations, expressed either through noncompliance or by active departure from customary ritual protocols, this chapter considered under the rubric of ritual transgression.

This chapter also considered the motivation for ritual transgression. Understood as an embodiment of social conflict, ritual transgression expresses social protest and is a means of confronting or provoking the ruling hierarchy, power structure, or status quo. It may also reflect and enact the formation of a new cultural identity. Ritual transgression is typical of reform movements or new religious movements which are distinguished by their innovative and often socially deviant ritual practices.

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9

RITUAL MODIFICATION AND INNOVATION

Richard S. Ascough

Introduction

Whenever an individual or a group embeds a ritual in a new context, that ritual most often undergoes some form of change on a scale from minor ("modification") to major ("innovation"). This is not the same as the process Catherine Bell calls "ritualization," which is the shift of normal everyday practice becoming ritual action (1992, 74). In the case of ritual modification and innovation, extant and recognized ritual practices are changed over time. This phenomenon is reflected in certain texts in the Bible (Gorman 1995, 29; MacDonald 2016b, 4), including those written by and for early Jesus adherents. Arising within the context of Second Temple Judaism, Jesus adherents naturally adopted and adapted the rituals of ancient Israel. With increasing numbers of non-Judeans joining Christ groups, further modifications were incorporated into the rituals as these sectarian groups grappled with a new identity separate from but related to a long-standing tradition. The Gospel of Luke presents an interesting case study of how one writer draws on the heritage of Israel to frame Jesus' words and actions. In so doing, his narrative reflects modifications and innovations to ritual purification, prayer, and meal practices framed by his understanding of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel and by the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 CE.

Defining and describing ritual change

It is by virtue of their regularity and repetition that particular actions are designated "ritual," and thus for many scholars "there is a tendency to think of ritual as something traditional or essentially unchanging" (Uro 2016, 73). For example, Rappaport states clearly, "I take the term 'ritual' to denote the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers" (1999, 24), thus ruling out any option for "change, creativity, and

innovation" (Grimes 2014, 189). As a result, ritual innovation or invention does not appear as a major theme in ritual theory, and few scholars write extensively on it (Uro 2016, 73).

This is not, however, a universal position, and there are some scholars for whom rituals are always in a state of flux (Bell 1997, 222). Even when the form of the ritual remains the same, a change of context or a shift in interpretation represents a modification of that ritual (Kreinath 2004, 270). In many cases, however, form and meaning are interrelated. "Changes in form stimulate changes in meaning and conversely, change in meaning will have an effect on change in form as well" (Kreinath 2004, 271). As Bell points out, "Part of the dilemma of ritual change lies in the simple fact that rituals tend to present themselves as the unchanging, time-honored customs of an enduring community" (1997, 210). Yet rituals do undergo modification, change, and sometimes even transformation. Bell provides a detailed example with a diachronic examination of baptism and Eucharist in the Christian West over many centuries. In terms of the latter – Eucharist – she rightly notes that some of the changes were "accidental," due more to circumstance and context than due to some (claimed) "revelation," but both types of changes were necessary to maintain the relevance of the ritual for changing communities (1997, 220). As a result of the work of Bell and others, ritual innovation is coming more to the fore in ritual studies, although it remains in need of much more analysis and theorization (Frevel 2016, 133; Grimes 2014, 295).

The difference between a ritual "modification" and a ritual "innovation" is hard to gauge, as there is no demarcation for how much a ritual needs to change to move from one category to the other. In general, "modifications" are minor changes to the ritual that do not substantially change how the ritual might be identified. Grimes provides a diachronic example of a wedding ritual in which a couple might once have been referred to in the ceremony as "man and wife," which has more recently been changed to "husband and wife" (2014, 295). A ritual transformation, however, brings about some fundamental shift in the ritual's identity wherein essential elements of the ritual change, as we will see below in the case of the baptism by John the Baptist. Nevertheless, between modification and innovation exists "a wide spectrum of how rituals can possibly change" while remaining an essential part of group identity (Kreinath 2004, 267–268). This is different than ritual transgression, which involves "conflict, contestation, and disputing identity," according to Richard DeMaris (Chapter 8).

Modification and/or innovation in ritual practice has been rightly placed into the category "transfer of ritual," in which "a rite or a ritual is transferred from one context to another" (Langer et al. 2006, 1–2, 7). Such changes can occur either to the contextual aspects in which the ritual is performed or within the ritual itself. The increasingly popular shift of North American wedding rituals from a religious sanctuary (most often a church) to a holiday destination (a beach) represents a modification of the context of the ritual. When the ceremony itself largely follows the Christian ritual structure but includes readings from other religious traditions (e.g., Buddhism) or non-religious sources, it reflects an internal modification.

There are a number of ways in which a ritual might be altered in either context or practice including (but not limited to) those shown in Table 9.1 (adapted from Langer et al. 2006, 2).

TABLE 9.1 Ritual alteration

Contextual aspects	Internal dimensions
Media in which the ritual appears	Script
Geographic location	Performance
Space utilization	Aesthetics
Cultural context	Structure
Group composition (incl. gender)	Self-reflectivity
Historical antecedents (real or claimed)	Interaction
	Communication
	Symbolism
	Objects

Changes in one aspect or dimension will often lead to changes in the other, so that it is not always clear whether the context changed to which the ritual responded, or the ritual changed, which resulted in a change in context. Either way, the ritual becomes something other than what it was. Even a change of context will affect the internal dynamics, and a change of internal dynamics may invite or even require a change of context.

Contextual aspects of ritual most clearly refer to the immediate environs of the ritual itself. However, broader social contexts also play a part in ritual modification. As Risto Uro rightly notes,

> Ritual innovations are seldom completely new in their historical and cultural contexts. New rituals are built on existing rituals and cultural elements – sometimes copied or modified from more distant or exotic "primordial" contexts. This is essential in promoting the "archetypal" quality of a new rite.
>
> *(2016, 75)*

For example, in describing how rituals were introduced into Soviet social life in the mid-1960s, Bell notes that there was a concerted effort to disseminate particular activities among the public in ways that would make them acceptable. Interestingly, she argues that the process of developing these rituals, in many ways secular replacements for religiously infused rituals marking transitional life experiences, "was not one of complete creation ex nihilo" (Bell 1997, 227). She notes how "various familiar symbols and traditions were readily appropriated in bits and pieces to fashion something that was evocative while still espousing sentiments in keeping with official directives" (1997, 227). In order for new or modified rituals to take root, they must have some connection to the community in which they are a part, often by adapting "familiar images and patterns to new purposes, including the self-definition of communities" (1997, 237).

A modern example of ritual modification as a result of the impact of broader socio-cultural contexts can be seen in the mindfulness movement that has taken hold in the West, where practices derived from ascetic Buddhist monks are being used variously across multiple sectors of society (see Wilson 2014). Although Westernized practices have a century-long history of development, a few key proponents of what would come to be known as mindfulness are credited with modifying and innovating Buddhist practices for popular consumption, including Thich Nhat Hanh, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, and John Kabat-Zinn, among others. Through experiential workshops and seminars, more and more people began regularly practicing a new form of mindful awareness tailor-made for the American context. Although claiming to draw heavily upon tradition, proponents were also clear in adapting Buddhist practices for a non-Buddhist audience. For example, at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) run by Kornfield and Goldstein,

> a conscious attempt was made to downplay chanting, ceremony, and many aspects of Buddhist cosmology and belief. This does not necessarily mean that the teachers did not themselves appreciate such things, but they perceived them as potential obstacles to American students.
>
> *(Wilson 2014, 33)*

Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) plays down the Buddhist connection even further, focusing on "a scientific rather than a religious" framework (Wilson 2014, 35; cf. Maex 2011). Thus, despite the claims of many mindfulness teachers, the breathing rituals and ritualized poses associated with the movement do not fully replicate ancient practices nor are they necessarily derived from Buddhist texts. As Wilson notes, "prior to the 20th century, few everyday Buddhists would have even heard of mindfulness practice, much less read texts on it or engaged in it themselves" (2014, 19), and even the Buddhist monastics practiced it in ways not seen in the mindfulness movement (2014, 38).

Wilson summarizes the disparate elements of the 1960s and 70s that collectively led to the success of the mindfulness movement among non-Buddhists in the United States in the late twentieth century:

> the growth of higher education; the creation of the religious studies discipline; the rise in Asian immigration; the founding of American meditation-oriented Buddhist centers; the countercultural revolution; the popularity of psychology; the deepening political, military, and cultural entanglement in Southeast Asia; and the publishing of mindfulness travelogues by Western laypeople.
>
> *(Wilson 2014, 31)*

This modern example of ritual modification is more complex than can be given justice here, but nonetheless shows the two key elements of ritual modification and innovation: contextual shifts and internal adaptations.

What this example also illustrates is just how many factors can affect change in ritual, both internal aspects and narrow and broad external contextual dynamics. Rarely does change occur only through outside influences or through internal adaptations, and such dichotomization can be unhelpful (Handelman 2004, 11–12). We are better served to think in terms of a "fuzzy" dynamic framing wherein rituals are modified and transformed by both socio-cultural environments and the internal performances themselves which are constantly re-framing the ritual (Handelman 2004, 15–19, for which he draws upon the Mobius ring as an illustration).

It is one thing to trace ritual change in a modern, observable period such as mindfulness in the West, but doing it for antiquity presents a special set of problems, although it is still possible. For example, Risto Uro explores John's baptism as a ritual innovation. He begins by pointing out that ritual innovations must prove efficacious among participants while also meeting the challenge of some people being disappointed (2016, 74). For this latter aspect, he points to the description of disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesos whose baptism is deemed insufficient by Paul since it did not include the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–7; 18:25). Nevertheless, there was a core group of followers for whom this ritual innovation towards bodily purity – moving from everyday ritual bathing in a *miqveh* to a one-time ritual immersion – was sufficiently attractive to draw them into new ritualized behavior that differed in form. Rather than self-administered ritual washings, John's immersion involved an agent (John or one of his disciples) who facilitated the ritual (Uro 2016, 82–85). Based on studies in the Cognitive Science of Religion, Uro hypothesizes, "special agent rituals are intuitively sensed as more powerful than rituals with other structural profiles" and as such "often trigger emotional arousal and play a significant role in motivating and energizing members of a movement" (2016, 87; cf. 92). The public, individual, and confessional nature of participation in the ritual involved high emotional and social costs, which served to "enhance social cohesion and solidarity in John's community," which included practices such as prayer and fasting (2016, 94).

Uro's analysis is predominantly at the historical level, attempting to discover just what was innovative about the ritual practice of John "the Immerser" and the impact on the individuals involved and the Christ adherents that later undertook the ritual of baptism as an initiatory practice. Yet broadly construed religious innovations "rarely occur even today in the religious sphere alone," and "in antiquity, they were always part of wider patterns of change" that included social, cultural, and political dimensions (Woolf 2015, 1–2). In this case, from the mid-first century BCE Judea saw the rise to prominence of the Roman imperial presence in the land of Israel along with a number of individual religious specialists who acted outside of the ancient cultic system, the two of most interest to us being John the Baptizer and Jesus of Nazareth, both of whom appear in the four written accounts of Jesus that were eventually embedded in the New Testament canon.

At the narrative level, the Gospel of Luke presents the innovations of John's water purification ritual as fulfillment of Isaiah's claim that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6, quoting Is 40:5). It is freely available to everyone in

the crowds that come out to see and hear him, despite his berating of them ("you brood of vipers," 3:7) and his challenging demands for social and economic justice (3:10–14). This latter text fits well with similar texts found throughout the remainder of Luke's Gospel and is unparalleled in Mark and Matthew (which together with Luke are designated the "Synoptic Gospels" because they tell the narrative in similar ways; in this essay, I presume that Luke is using Mark as one of his sources). According to Luke, such words and actions leave the people wondering whether John is the Messiah (3:15), although the reader is already aware that John is anticipatory of Jesus, who is the actual Messiah. For Luke, John's modifications to Jewish water purification rituals are likewise anticipatory of the Gospel story's broader concern with ritual modifications and innovations. The writer uses Jesus' words and actions to depict changes to Jewish cult practice, shifting them from being centered on the temple to being more broadly construed as available to individuals and communities at any time and place.

Caution is warranted, however, as we turn our attention to the text of the Gospel of Luke in more detail, since, "as has long been observed, a text is not a ritual" (MacDonald 2016b, 8). Narrative texts can represent some aspects of ritual practices but are not composed as ritual manuals, and thus ritual modifications are not always explicitly named (cf. Frevel 2016, 137). With "textualization," there are at least two possibilities for understanding how rituals are modified (cf. Frevel 2016, 138). The first is that it represents ritual innovation that has already taken place. This certainly is the case with the story of John the Baptist and his water ritual in the Jordan River.

The other possibility with textualization is that it is meant to provoke or advocate ritual innovation. Narratives can have a role in making new connections and relationships that deliberately or inadvertently impact ritual performance (Frevel 2016, 138; cf. MacDonald 2016a; 2016b, 9). This is much more difficult to ascertain, especially since biblical rituals must be discussed in terms of their textual form and the practices themselves can never be observed (Frevel 2016, 148). "The performance of the rituals may have had a practical background, but they are now embedded in a textual world, which has an autonomous character and functions on the textual level" (Frevel 2016, 150). For example, when the temple was rebuilt, following the destruction of the original, sources indicate that the holy of holies was left empty, perhaps to accommodate Torah scrolls, which would "replace the ark of the covenant as the iconic focus of Israel's worship," since the ark served a number of ritual functions, including representing "God's presence in Israel" (Watts 2016, 21, 22). With both these possibilities in mind – text as *reflecting* ritual modification and text as *promoting* ritual modification – we turn our attention to the narrative world of Luke's Gospel to explore how ritual modification and innovation are presented therein.

Temple and ritual in the Gospel of Luke

In looking at Luke's Gospel, we need to recognize at the outset that it is not a manual on ritual, and thus we cannot expect to find much specificity when it

comes to outlining ritual procedures, much less modifications and innovations to rituals. Nevertheless, as we noted, ritual dynamics can be reflected in narrative texts, particularly when ritual texts are embedded "within a larger textual framework" (Gorman 1995, 23; cf. DeMaris 2008, 9), and thus we will observe in Luke's Gospel how the narrative presents ritual behavior particularly by focusing on the temple and even validates innovative ritual behaviors for readers who belong to a Christ group.

The Jerusalem temple looms large in the Gospel of Luke, particularly at the beginning and the ending of the narrative (Taylor 2004; cf. Lanier 2014, 439–46). For Luke, the temple provides the link to Israel's history while also symbolizing the shift to a new epoch in the interaction of God with people, one that opens up to include non-Israelites. The temple was the central focus of early first century CE Jewish worship. Herod the Great, for all his faults, was a keen builder, and he sank a lot of time and money into enlarging and enhancing the temple building, which took over eighty years to complete. It was a colossal structure with an outer colonnaded porch, a courtyard for the Gentiles, an inner courtyard for women, and an inner sanctuary where stood the holy of holies, the place of the yearly sacrifice for atonement for sin. Temple worship was controlled by the reigning high priest, who had working with him the chief priests and other functionaries. The men who comprised this group were all very wealthy, all lived in Jerusalem, and were all close friends of the Roman authorities who had the political power in the land. Ordinary priests, however, were only required to be in Jerusalem to conduct worship twice a year for one week at a time and during festivals; the rest of the time they lived throughout the land. This massive and awe-inspiring temple edifice stood complete for less than a decade before the Jewish rebellion resulted in the might of the Roman army entering full force into the land, eventually leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 CE.

Although Luke is writing at a time when Romans have already destroyed the temple, Jesus' story is set at a time prior to this destruction. Luke begins almost immediately by narrating a typical ritual at the temple, yet even in this story there is a variation to the ritual that sets the pattern throughout the Gospel. Zechariah, one of the ordinary priests, enters the temple to burn incense at the appointed hour, but the liturgy is disrupted by the appearance of an angel with a message about the forthcoming birth of Zechariah's son, John. In this opening story, the ritual variation comes miraculously by the hand of God (1:5–25). Within the infancy narrative itself (Luke 1:5–2:52), this is the first of a number of irregularities to ritual procedures expected in the temple.

After Jesus is born, Luke records in passing his ritual circumcision as having been done "according to custom" (2:21), but there follows a lengthier account of the prescribed purification ritual "according to the law of Moses" (2:22), for which Luke even parenthetically provides the textual justification with a composite quote from Exodus 13:2 and 12 (2:23). Luke then notes that while Jesus' parents are in the Temple "doing for him according to the law" (2:27), the ritual was disrupted by a Spirit-inspired righteous and devout man who took Jesus in his arms and

pronounced a blessing upon him, to the astonishment of his parents (2:25–33). Simeon then reveals the child's fate to Mary. The event is paralleled in a much truncated form in the story of the prophetess Anna, whose own piety keeps her constantly in the temple and for whom Jesus represents the redemption of Jerusalem (2:36–38). Despite these disruptions, however, Luke is careful to note that Jesus' parents "had performed everything according to the law of the Lord" (2:39) with respect to Jesus in the temple.

A final childhood story about Jesus concludes the opening section of Luke's Gospel and also involves the temple. When Jesus is twelve years old he travels from Nazareth to Jerusalem with his parents for Passover, as is required "by custom" (2:41–52). The ritual feast presumably goes as planned, since Luke quickly glosses it (2:43a). It is in the aftermath that we find deviation from the expected. Noticing that Jesus is not with them, his parents return to the temple to find Jesus deep in conversation with the teachers there, amazing them with his own wisdom. Embedded within his seemingly enigmatic response to his parents' inquiries, the boy provides the key to understanding why it is that he will eventually make significant modifications to the Jewish rituals set within the temple: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Each of these three temple stories is unique to Luke's Gospel and takes place around the time of a major life event: pregnancy, infant dedication, and puberty. And in each of these stories Luke clearly notes that the event is initiated as is prescribed by custom:

- "according to custom (*kata to ethos*)" (1:9);
- "according to what is customary (*kata to eithismenon*) under the law" (2:27; cf. 2:22, 23, 39);
- "according to custom (*kata to ethos*)" (2:42).

Each story does not reflect any sort of permanent modification to temple rituals, but the interruptions and deviations of expectations at the very least anticipate that Jesus will bring change to what takes place at the temple. Curiously, then, other than a brief mention of Jesus being brought to the pinnacle of the temple during the temptation account (4:9), the temple is not mentioned again in Luke's Gospel until the inauguration of the passion narrative in chapters 18 and 19 (except perhaps in 13:34–35; see Taylor 2004, 474). At that time, however, we find the author again drawing specific attention to the temple through disruption of regular and ritualized practices that eventually point to a modification of the temple rituals for those who adhere to the Christ cult.

Contextual ritual modification – prayer

After an elongated build-up to Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem (9:51–19:44), the very first event Luke narrates upon Jesus' entrance into the city is the radical action he takes in the courtyard of the temple (19:45–46). Although briefer than the parallel

accounts in the other three gospels (Matt 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; John 2:13–17), the Lukan version sets the tone for Jesus' interactions within the temple precincts. Jesus drives out the marketers, but in the Lukan version readers are not told that these include money-changers who would ensure the ritual purity of coins used to purchase sacrificial animals or pay for performance of temple rituals, as is the case in the other three versions. Luke likewise does not include mention of the sale of pigeons (Mark; Matthew; John) or sheep and oxen (John) for use in sacrificial rituals. Thus, in the Lukan version, references even suggestive of sacrifice are removed from the scene, which climaxes with Jesus declaiming "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers" (19:46). Jesus' words, the first clause of which is a quotation from Isaiah 56:7, are thus emphatic in the Lukan version that the temple was constructed to focus not on sacrificial rituals but prayer rituals (on the link between Jewish prayer and temple cult see Penner 2012, 67–71).

What follows is an assortment of speeches Jesus delivers that Luke brackets with reference to Jesus teaching daily in the temple and people coming out to hear him (19:47–48 and 21:37–38). Luke threads together a number of teachings, the first four of which are by way of conflict with authority figures from the temple itself, including debate on the ritual of John's baptism (20:2–8), taxation (20:20–26), marriage regulations (20:27–38), and, most tellingly, a critique of the temple authorities themselves only thinly disguised as a parable (20:9–19). Although these teachings seem to silence his critics ("they no longer dared to ask him another question," 20:40), Jesus does not cease his own challenges to their authority, warning people to beware of the scribes since they lay claim to undeserved respect both in the marketplace and synagogues and participate in long yet inauthentic prayer rituals (20:45–47).

Such anti-establishment teachings continue as Jesus praises a poor widow for her contribution to the temple treasury. On the surface, this might seem to support the continuation of the temple, but really serves as a condemnation to all those who "have contributed out of their abundance" (21:4). Such abundance was used to adorn the temple, comments on the beauty of which allow Luke to segue Jesus into a lengthier teaching about the coming conflagration that will result in the harassment of Jesus' followers and the eventual destruction of Jerusalem and the temple itself (21:5–35). Rather than provoking despair, however, Jesus pushes vigilance and prayer "that you may have the strength to escape all the things that will take place" (21:36). The temple will not survive, but Jesus' adherents will, and prayer is the ritual that will see them through. It is to prayer that Jesus himself turns when facing his own time of fear in the face of death (22:41–45).

We have noted that throughout this section of Luke's Gospel, within the context of the Jerusalem temple, Luke draws attention away from sacrifice rituals. Reader focus is directed particularly to the importance of prayer, which Jesus declaims to be the primary focus of the temple (19:46) yet is a practice abused by his adversaries in order to draw attention to themselves (20:47). This concern with proper approaches to prayer brings together earlier passages in Luke's Gospel that emphasize the

importance of prayer for Jesus' followers. Luke draws attention to prayer at critical moments in Jesus' own life. For example, only in Luke's Gospel does Jesus retreat to the wilderness for a time of prayer and renewal after dealing with "many crowds" coming to him for healing (5:16). And prior to choosing from among his disciples twelve whom would be deemed "apostles," Luke embellishes his Markan source to note not only the reason Jesus went out to the mountain – "to pray" – but that "he spent the night in prayer to God" (6:12–13). Perhaps more significantly, when a voice from heaven declares Jesus' identity as God's son, only Luke specifies that Jesus was praying: both immediately after his baptism (3:21) and immediately prior to his transfiguration (9:28). Similarly, in the story of Peter's identification of Jesus as "the Messiah of God" Luke is the only gospel writer to note that Jesus was in prayer at the time (9:18–20). Even when Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, using words that will later become known as the Lord's Prayer, Luke seems to add a preamble to a text from the Sayings Source (Q) that notes that Jesus himself was praying when the disciples approached him and asked him to teach them to do likewise (11:1).

Finally, Luke notes that Jesus left the city to go across the valley to the Mount of Olives "as was his custom (*kata to ethos*, 22:39)" which echoes references to customary rituals centered on the temple (1:9, 2:27, 2:42). In this instance, Jesus admonishes his followers, "Pray that you might not come into the time of trial" (22:40), before he himself withdraws a bit and "knelt down, and prayed" (22:41), asking God to "remove this cup from me" (22:41–42). The most reliable Greek manuscripts do not include additional information about the comfort of angels and Jesus sweating like drops of blood (22:43–44), which means the very next action is Jesus rising "from prayer" (22:45) to return to admonish the disciples again to "pray that you might not come to the time of trial" (22:46). This action seems almost choreographed in the narrative: admonishment to pray – kneeling to pray – rising from prayer – admonishment to pray. This leaves the reader with no doubt as to the importance Luke places on prayer rituals not only for Jesus but also for subsequent adherents.

All of these instances of Luke drawing specific attention to Jesus in prayer – at the baptism, renewal, identification, transfiguration, teaching, arrest – illustrate the core teaching of a story Jesus tells about a persistent widow, which Luke frames with Jesus encouraging his listeners "to pray always and not lose heart" (18:1), as Jesus himself does on the Mount of Olives. This story is immediately followed by a story of two men praying in the temple, one hypocritically and the other with appropriate humility (18:9–14). This second story returns the reader's attention to the temple, and it is shortly thereafter that the narrative has Jesus arrive at that very location. All of this emphasis on prayer, but particularly as linked to the temple both in these stories and by the reference to "custom," suggests that for Luke prayer is to inhabit life more than temple-based rituals, and is certainly not limited to being located at the temple.

Internal ritual modification – meals

Returning our own attention to the story of Jesus teaching in the temple, we can again pick up the thread of how Luke is narrating events to shift readers' attention

from the rituals of temple in ways that are suggestive of how Jesus' adherents will modify Jewish practices, and not just with regard to prayer. Meal rituals also had important links to the temple, yet Luke presents Jesus introducing modifications to dining practices among Jesus' followers. Dining of any form is always ritualized to some degree and for any number of reasons, although most often in order to set boundaries around insiders/outsiders and to solidify internal group solidarity (see Ascough 2012; idem, forthcoming).

Luke opens a new narrative section with reference to the Passover and the return of adversaries – the chief priests and scribes – who are seeking to have Jesus killed. Although there was not a requirement for pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover, many Judeans from the land and from the Diaspora did travel to the city. Passover itself lasted for seven days, beginning at sundown the first day with the eating of the ritually slain lamb along with unleavened bread. Jesus directs two of his followers to make preparations for the ritual meal in the upper room of a house (22:7–13).

In narrating the actual events at the meal, Luke modifies the version found in the Gospel of Mark, which serves as his source, both by providing a lengthy pream- ble and also by embellishing the words that Jesus uses when blessing the bread and the wine that he then distributes to those with him. There are (at least) two ritual modifications to consider in Luke's version of the story, the first being a modifica- tion to how the Passover meal ritual is conducted and the second a modification to the Markan version of how Jesus' followers are to memorialize Jesus through the sharing of bread and wine. We will consider each in turn, albeit briefly, recogniz- ing that much scholarly work has been done on this constellation of historical and literary issues associated with this text (cf. Ascough 2008, 282–85).

In Luke's version of the story, the meal Jesus shares with his "apostles" (22:14, perhaps a larger group than the "twelve" noted in Mark 14:17) is very clearly a Passover meal, as Luke has Jesus declaim, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (22:15). The time of Passover recalled the Israelites' expe- rience of deliverance from Egyptian bondage, as recounted in Exodus. The Passover meal itself was a ritual that had four distinct parts (although it is unclear whether this was fully in place during Jesus' time). During the preliminary course, a cup of wine and a blessing accompanied a dish of bitter herbs. The liturgy proper included the drinking of a second cup of wine alongside recitation of formulaic questions about the events of the exodus and the singing of a psalm. The meal itself was initi- ated through the blessing of unleavened bread and the eating of the Passover lamb was again accompanied by a cup of wine. More psalm singing concluded the meal, and perhaps a fourth and final cup of wine.

Although some scholars have attempted to map the Lukan version of Jesus' meal onto the stages of the Passover ritual (Jeremias 1966, 15–88), that there are only two cups of wine rather than three (or even four) suggests that Luke is attempting something different. Drawing on his Markan source, Luke moves forward Jesus' claim that he shall no longer "drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (22:22) and even embellishes it by having Jesus also state separately (and earlier) that he will not eat the Passover meal again "until it [presumably the

Passover] is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (22:16). Thus, the Passover meal ritual is mooted, although not obliterated, by Luke through the bracketing claims of awaiting the kingdom of God. It seems that for Jesus' adherents there is to be an alternative ritual use of food and drink that will evoke new salvific actions of God, actions that involve Jesus as the sacrifice that will inaugurate a "new covenant" between God and people. Luke is clearly emphatic in interjecting the word "new" before "covenant" (22:20, as is also the case in the Pauline version, 1 Cor 11:25).

Turning to the words and actions of Jesus in sharing the bread and wine with his fellow banqueters, Luke's version bears similarities with Mark's version (14:22–24; cf. Matt 26:26–28) and yet is more fully aligned with the wording recorded by Paul in 1 Corinthians (Table 9.2).

TABLE 9.2 Parallel accounts of Jesus' ritualized meal

Mark 14:22–24	Luke 22:19–20	1 Cor 11:23–25
While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."	Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."	The Lord Jesus … took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The Pauline version certainly pre-dates Mark in terms of when it was written down, but this does not solve the puzzling question as to which version was first in use and which, if any, reflects the actual words spoken by Jesus. What is interesting here is that whether or not Luke is following Paul or another written source, he is presenting an alternative format to the actions of Jesus that he has before him in his Markan source. In the Markan story (and repeated in Matthew) there is no indication that Jesus is here initiating a ritual – that Jesus' words and actions are to be used in a ritualized meal setting by future adherents. The notion of "remembrance" – that is, of ritualized performance that evokes a contextualized history – only appears in the narrative history of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. It is not unique to Luke, since, as we noted, Paul also records Jesus' words and actions as initiating a ritual of remembrance. It is unlikely, then, that Luke is innovative here – he is not himself introducing a new ritual. He is, however, modifying an extant narrative (Mark's) in such a way as to provide the context for an innovative ritual that is being used by some Jesus adherents. In so doing, Luke presents it as supplementary to, or perhaps even an alternative to, the ritualized meal sharing of Passover.

In the Lukan account of Jesus' meal, the distribution of the first cup among the apostles functions as a truncated version of the Passover ritual, which is then reinterpreted in the second part of the account in which Jesus declares that his own body and blood function as a new bond, a new covenant, between God and people. Whereas the lamb was the memorial sacrifice in the Passover ritual, Jesus now points to himself as that new sacrifice: "my body … given for you" and "my blood" which is "poured out for you" (22:19–20). The salvation that came through the Passover is re-remembered in a new ritual that recalls for later Jesus adherents the sacrificial, and thus the salvific, role Jesus played for them. This is encapsulated later in Luke's Gospel by the words of the risen Jesus to the disciples in which he declares what happened to him to be a fulfillment of the Jewish scriptures – "the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms" (24:44) – in order that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name, beginning from Jerusalem" (24:46–47).

As if to underscore the importance of a meal ritual in which Jesus' adherents memorialize, and to some degree encounter, Jesus, Luke includes a post-resurrection story of two men traveling away from Jerusalem and joined by a stranger, whom the readers know to be the risen Jesus. After recounting recent events, the men invite the stranger to join them for dinner, whereupon they fully recognize him as Jesus at the moment he takes bread, breaks it, and hands it to them (24:30–31). It is through the actions of taking, breaking, and distributing that followers can fully encounter the risen Jesus. For Luke, there is no longer need for an annual Passover meal to recall God's salvation; it can come regularly in the ritualization of daily meals.

Despite their intention of traveling to Emmaus, the two men return to Jerusalem in order to tell Jesus' disciples of their encounter on the road with Jesus. Thus, the center of the narrative action is returned to the city. And just as Luke opened his Gospel with a scene in the temple (1:8–23), so also does he end the narrative with another clear and direct reference: having observed Jesus ascend into the sky, the disciples return to Jerusalem where, Luke tells the reader, "they were continually in the temple blessing God" (24:53). There can be no doubt that Luke aims to draw his readers' attention to the importance of the temple, yet as we have seen, the temple, and its attendant rituals, are modified in light of Jesus' words and actions, especially his death and resurrection.

In light of the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, and thus the disappearance of the context for temple rites, along with the increasing number of non-Judeans becoming Christ adherents, Luke's portrayal of the temple both underlines its importance as part of the heritage of the Christ groups while pointing the way to ritual modifications for a new time and place. Rather than narrate new or replacement rituals, Luke is evocatively indicating that modifications to the customary place of temple within ritual behavior were acceptable and even necessary in Jesus' own lifetime.

Luke is not the first to grapple with the necessity of ritual change in the face of a destroyed temple.

> The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the forced migration of many elites to Babylonia in 587 BCE necessitated considerable alterations to Israelite

> religious practice. Sabbath, circumcision, and prayer have often been pointed to as practices that come to particular prominence in a world without sanctuary.
>
> *(MacDonald 2016b, 6–7)*

The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE once again leaves in question how God is to be seen as present with God's people. For Luke, who sees God's people as inclusive of but broader than the Judeans, God's presence is known through contact with the risen Jesus. Although the temple was significant in the ritual life of Judeans prior to the time of Jesus, Luke understands the death and resurrection of Jesus to have obviated the need for the temple, since its core rituals are more immediately available to Jesus adherents wherever they are located. This is perhaps nowhere better symbolized when Luke, following Mark, records that as Jesus is dying on the cross, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two" (23:45).

Conclusion

Diachronic forms of ritual transference are particularly important for understanding how early Christ groups understood their rituals. One form is "the re-adoption or reinvention of a ritual after a break in its practice by the group whose tradition the ritual belongs" (Langer et al. 2006, 4). In the Jewish Diaspora, many ritual modifications had already been introduced (cf. MacDonald 2016b), but certainly in the face of the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, Judeans needed to re-configure rituals that had formerly been linked directly to the temple, such as animal sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood and offering of incense by the High Priest in the temple's Holy of Holies. Christ groups both prior to and after the temple's destruction faced an additional challenge as they became increasingly populated by non-Judeans. Nevertheless, many of them continued to (re-)claim some (albeit not all) Jewish ritual practices, yet in doing so they adopted and adapted them. By way of contrast, the most obvious ritual that was not adopted by non-Judeans was circumcision, seen especially in Paul's rejection of this rite for those not born Jewish (see Choi in this volume).

Luke's Gospel is the reflection of just one instance in the broader phenomenon. Yet, it is not clear whether Luke himself is attempting to reframe rituals as a "ritual expert" for a new communal context (cf. Bell 1997, 223) or whether he is reflecting in his account the adaptation and modification of Jewish rituals already present within a community (cf. Handelman 2004). Since all we have is Luke's writing, we cannot know with any certainty whether changes have been made by practitioners, which are later recorded by Luke, or whether Luke himself is suggesting the changes. There are at least some hints that both might be taking place. Luke opens his Gospel by acknowledging previous accounts, which he is attempting to compile and synthesize (1:1–4). At least one of these accounts – the Gospel of Mark – is available to us. Thus, we can examine parallel passages in the two Gospels and note changes that Luke has introduced to the description of a ritual. While far from

certain, at least at the literary level it looks like Luke might be presenting some of his own nuance, especially with respect to prayer. But Luke also records traditions that have developments outside of his Gospel. As we saw, the ritualized elements of the so-called last supper are similar to the Passover ritual, but also have key differences. But some of these differences in Luke are exactly the same as the differences between Paul's recording of a "tradition handed down" concerning the ritual of the "Lord's supper." So, in this case, it may be Paul, or some unknown predecessor (even Jesus), that has modified a ritual that eventually makes its way into Luke's account.

It is important to note that ritual changes – modifications, innovations, or even transfer – are perceived from the etic, or outsider's, perspective, particularly that of later historians (Langer et al. 2006, 1). For group insiders (the emic perspective) the rituals are often perceived as static – the way they have always been. There is continuity with the past that links the current group to all that have gone before them. In this context, modified rites "are integral to the construction of many forms of communal identity," yet rely on preexisting relationships among participants (Bell 1997, 252). In the case of the Christ group(s) for which Luke writes, the rituals that Jesus' teachings engender are consistent with the heritage of Israel, which the group itself can claim as their own. For insiders, there is no innovation; Jesus simply expresses how these rituals have always been or, at least, should have always been, performed (recall, "my house shall be a house of prayer," 19:46). Ritual practices "consolidate the ideology and moral values of the movement," and without some sort of ritual system, "the core beliefs would not be remembered; nor would they be transmitted to the next generation" (Uro 2016, 1). While the temple may be destroyed, Luke preserves rituals that link the Jesus adherents to what he considers the core cult practices of Israel.

What is significant about the observations we have made is how Luke theologizes ritual modifications through the contextual lens of the temple. Whether Jesus, John, the disciples, or any other practitioner introduced the innovations, Luke wants his readers to understand these changes as linked to, yet moving beyond, the history of Israel and the close connection to God that the Jewish people felt through the temple. Such connections are not obviated with the destruction of the temple, but they require changes in ritual behavior, not limited to but including water purifications, prayer, and meals.

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CONCLUSION

Steps forward in the study
of early Christian ritual life

Hal Taussig

This volume on early Christian ritual life opens up large new possibilities for the study of early Christianity. Study of ritual as an aspect of the larger emergence of some early Christianities by the mid-to-late third century is practically non-existent. As if the complex and widely diverse precursors to early Christianities and those early Christianities[1] themselves all existed solely in a word-heavy, belief-driven universe, almost all major studies of Jesus-related texts and phenomena simply leave out ritual. Of course, this great ignorance of a wide variety of ritual performances and investments in early Christianity overall flies in the face of thick strands of evidence for ritualizations in the New Testament and other texts. Even where scholarship of the last 150 years acknowledges that there were table gatherings and washing rituals, these events are portrayed as straightforward archetypes of later Christian eucharist and baptism, with neither critical historical investigation of nor suitable theoretical approaches to them. In addition to these shortcomings, the thick evidence in this volume of a variety of other ritualizations has rarely been acknowledged in book length.

So this volume provides wide-ranging attention to individual and communal practice and performance rather than the sad and paltry platitudes of most previous biblical and church history scholarship about the ritual life of early Christ movements and early Christianity. By and large, eschewing the general assumptions of previous scholarship that ritualization played subsidiary roles to iconic belief systems and scriptural manifestos or determinative epics, this book points toward more serious, idiosyncratic, and energetic ritual life in the first three centuries of early "Christianity."

Wading into deep and swirling water with shoes and clothing meant for the classroom, we contributors to this volume deserve some credit for our courage and persistence. As the Introduction to this volume suggests, our volume about early Christian ritual life faces many difficulties, due mostly to the unknown waters into

which we step. Overall academic study of ritual, although not completely new, has little of the experience and breadth of most major intellectual disciplines. When it exists, such study of ritual has for the most part been hidden or overwhelmed by historical, theological, literary, and social science counter narratives or assumptions.

Similarly, almost all scholarship of the first three centuries of the Common Era has been prejudiced against analysis of ritual, untutored in critical vocabulary of ritual phenomena, deeply compromised by its theological presuppositions and more recently by its anti-religious cultural investments. Protestant bias against meaningful ritual has not allowed much scholarly space for thinking analytically about ritual in early Christ or Jesus movements or early Christian groups. And, Catholic imaginations of these early centuries have tended to retroject later Catholic ritual forms and meanings into the first three centuries. A small thread of scholarly analysis of ritual in the Christ movements and early Christian constellations has existed for the better part of the last 150 years, but has been regularly overwhelmed by the logocentric biases of the broader fields. That thread itself is severely tangled and frayed as much of its efforts are overly dependent on early twentieth-century history and phenomenology of religions and derivative of theological paradigms.

So we wade in anyway. Our essays are determined to do better. There are clear vows not to repeat the Protestant or Catholic paradigms of belief-centered or magisterial framing of ritual action. There is energetic attention to details of context, gesture, and socio-cultural meaning-making at local levels. We lean clearly into ritual theorizing.

On the other hand, our wading in is cautious, highly conscious of not overstating things or making broad applications. Even when one or two of us occasionally wax archetypal, we are hesitant to say too much.

In addition, as Richard DeMaris's fine Introduction demonstrates, ritual theories and typological analyses have broadly different approaches and do not possess coherent methodological assumptions. The nineteenth through twenty-first century theoretical efforts have not produced clear directions for a larger discipline. Indeed, our volume here depends on a broad range of methodologies and theories, according to each particular essay's proclivities. That Richard DeMaris's Introduction uses Catherine Bell's larger complex theorizing bodes well for this book's contributions, and Bell's work is used also by more than one of this volume's essays. So one could make a case that Bell's writings do mark some forward movement in the more-than-century-long thread of analytical attempts, especially with her regular attentiveness to the history of the last 150 years of ritual theories and her willingness to critique many methodological approaches. DeMaris's only implicit endorsement of Bell as a key voice appropriately recognizes the widely different theoretical impulses in the volume's essays.

While the larger categories of this book's table of contents map a set of cohering subject matter (interacting with the divine, group interactions, contesting and creating ritual protocols), very few of the essays attempt to address larger sweeps of subject matter. Our essays tend to identify very particular nodes of ritualizing and only one or two textual sites within the first centuries. This does not allow

a broader integration of the three primary categories guiding the book's overall contents.

Granted, it has been quite typical of New Testament and early Christian studies to work piecemeal on topics, sites, and texts since the early twentieth century. So our book does follow larger patterns of scholarship aiming at very limited subject matter, and passing up opportunities to address broader connected phenomena. The careful specificities of each essay have not as an ensemble produced a coherent approach, broad characterizations of early Christian ritual life, or particular pay-offs for the broader efforts to describe Christian beginnings. The progress is in the specific rigors and steady care of particular topical discussion.

This approach is in significant contrast to another recent book of similar frame, Risto Uro's *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Approach* (2016). Uro has a full-blown ideology and methodology that he applies to the whole of early Christianity. And although the small book does not apply this socio-cognitive depth ideology and methodology in any breadth of early Christianity, there are a good number of articles already in circulation that do. My unease at this fully formed and overarching assertion about early Christian beginnings and ritual is not its coherent proposal about early Christian ritual and how to theorize it. Indeed, I hope strongly for long-delayed theoretical and historical productivity. The reason I prefer our volume in this regard is that its writers are not yet willing—at least in these pages—to claim they have found good enough ritual theory that can be applied broadly to the range of phenomena in early Christianity. This—at times frustrating—incompleteness and lack of larger pronouncement has important integrity. In particular, our book's hesitance for the most part to embrace socio-cognitive approaches and those approaches' attendant functionalist psychology allows for some additional complication. Our book's patient and incomplete application of a pastiche of cultural anthropology, updated phenomenology, material culture studies, and recent approaches in the history of religion has promise for more steady progress, less universalistic hubris, and eventual complicated integrative and overarching portraits of early Christian ritual life.

This book then serves as a significant marker in the development of study of early Christian ritual life. The book, alongside lead editor Richard DeMaris's 2008 work, *The New Testament in Its Ritual World*, establishes an initial language world and beginning point for disciplined study. As noted earlier in this concluding chapter, this book's chapters do not take on—for the most part—major issues in early Christian ritual life. Those choices by my fellow authors help my concluding chapter itself to address some of the major issues, not as major studies, but as an assessment of where the study of early Christian ritual life is at this juncture and what kind of prospects lie ahead in the next decade.

This final chapter makes that assessment in three major steps. First, it seeks to say where this field finds itself in terms of method and particular study disciplines. Again, here the object is not to make new methodological proposals or give a history of methodological steps in study of early Christian ritual life, but to describe the lay of the land. Second comes an assessment of where this relatively

new study is in terms of the history of early Christian ritual life. Third come some recommendations and cautionary comments regarding the future study of early Christian ritual life. These assessments by a single scholar of early Christian ritual (myself) call for a certain hubris, and I apologize in advance to the reader for my errors and arrogance.

The methodological lay of the land

The major methodological and disciplinary categories form here subsets of issues already underway in broader ritual studies and in scholarship on Christian beginnings.

Ritual theory

Methods and categories for studying early Christian ritual life are derived more or less completely from the larger academic frameworks of ritual theory developed over the past 175 years. These larger academic methods and categories have been by and large grounded in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century encounters with religious life in non-western worlds. That such (primarily anthropological) theories also traded (perhaps illicitly) in analysis of ancient non-western ritual practices has allowed their use in analysis of early Christian ritual life without raising a range of epistemological questions about whether one can analyze ritual life that is no longer alive. So at this juncture, in both epistemological and more general terms, the strength and weakness of theorizing early Christian ritual life are tied directly to the larger trajectory of modern ritual theory.

DeMaris's excellent assessment of critical ritual theory of the New Testament (2008, 1–10), which details a number of diffuse efforts in the last twenty years, is clear that "critical study of its [New Testament-related communities] ritual life is only beginning" (2008, 1). To illustrate this beginning stage, he adds, "The ritual criticism of the New Testament is early enough in its development that it may be premature to attempt something systematic and comprehensive" (2008, 6). Indeed, it seems that our essays in this book illustrate a similar dilemma in putting critical essays together into a book.

Perhaps even more important is to notice how our book relies on several distinctly different theories of ritualization. For instance, Richard Ascough's essay, which cites a range of scholars, including those he seems to disagree with, works especially with Catherine Bell and Jens Kreinath in theorizing change and modification in ritual. Steven Muir, whose essay also deals with change and ritual, uses primarily Clifford Geertz, and does not cite Bell or Kreinath at all. I do not in any way seek to show that one or the other author is at fault, but simply that ritual theory is diffuse as a phenomenon itself. This does raise serious questions for the larger enterprise itself of theorizing ritual. If there are not significant similarities among the major theories of ritual, productive conversation about the meaning of ritual life in early Christianity seems improbable. I am not suggesting that theorizing

ritual must approach all questions in lockstep. But lack of major overlap in basic critical approaches to early Christian ritual life makes advances in understanding much more complicated.

Perhaps most difficult in this regard is the strong polarization between many American and European scholars. Although American scholars are far from united on theoretical bases for thinking about ritual life in early Christianity, most of the leading voices in American ritual theory over the past four decades have pursued site-and-culture-specific approaches to ritual. This rings also true for the most part—but not entirely—in the essays in this book. Similarly, American scholars have strongly critiqued cross-cultural meanings of ritual, and hesitated to propose universal truths in ritual practice. On the other hand, leading European scholars have widely applied what they call "cognitive science" in explicit critique of the largely American preference for culture-specific approach so that cognitive science might "help counter the one-sided emphasis on social distance" (Luomanen, Pyysiäinen, and Uro 2007, 17). In 2016, Risto Uro published *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Approach*, which examines ritual healing practices in Jesus circles and early baptismal practices to "generate and promote religious knowledge" (2016, 14). For Uro and others, "the cognitive science of religion which focuses on why there are cross-culturally recurrent patterns in human thought and behavior can also be used to explain the various unique manifestations of more general principles" (Luomanen, Pyysiäinen, and Uro 2007, 20).

Ritual and human subjectivity

One might think with good reason that the discipline of ritual and subjectivity falls under the domain of ritual theory. I list it separately in that there is important work in progress long term on ritual and human subjectivity in other fields that is not explicitly about ritual theory. Primary in this regard are the fields of cultural anthropology and material culture.

Cultural anthropology—both in the broad span of the twentieth century and more specifically in the last 25 years—rarely points explicitly to ritual theory, but has built up very clear and extensive field work protocols that embody long and arduous disciplined study of ritual as part of broader attention to human subjectivity. This happens (usually in field work) as a general topic about how human subjectivity and cultural reality interact in ritual life and as particular investigations of special social sites, practices, and ritualizations. This book's essays provide examples of the character of human subjectivity in relationship to early Christian ritual life. Jonathan Schwiebert's essay (Chapter 1) uses a number of such studies in examining a wide range of humans honoring the divine ritually. Such has also been the case during the past 25 years in occasional essays and articles about a particular ritual relative to particular human subjectivity and agency within early Christian ritual life. There are certainly at least 50 such articles of this nature, all of which cannot be listed here. Several classic examples are Stanley Stowers's "Elusive Coherence: Ritual and Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 10–11" (1996); Hal Taussig's "Dealing Under the Table:

Ritual Negotiation of Women's Power in the Syro–Phoenician Woman Pericope" (1996); and Angela Standhartiger's "The Saturnalia in Greco–Roman Culture" (2012).

Material culture is a relatively new field that takes human subjectivity seriously through the meanings of, and interactions with, materiality. Objects form a primary trajectory of thinking about how human subjectivity and meaning take shape by virtue of materiality. Relative to early Christian ritual life and human subjectivity, material culture study ends up assessing the likes of bathing pools, dining rooms, food stuffs, festivals, clothing, and sarcophagi. Here too our volume demonstrates in a number of chapters interest in material culture and some attention to this tradition of scholarship. Of particular interest is the attention to the murals in the Via Latina catacomb houses in Nicola Hayward's "Early Christian Funerary Ritual" (Chapter 6). And there is some indication in the larger trajectory of scholarship on early Christian ritual life of consultation with this work. Take, for instance, Elizabeth Castelli's attention to visual representations of Thecla in fifth century martyrologies and pilgrimage souvenirs as well as her treatment of memorabilia in the wake of the twenty-first century Columbine shooting in *Memory and Martyrdom: Early Christian Culture Making* (2007). In this book, Erin Vearncombe's broad and masterful use of material culture deserves notice. Her essay shows how both clothing and table manners act as ritualization within the behavior field of Greco–Roman associations and derivatively in early Christian ritual life. Similarly, her forthcoming *What Would Jesus Wear? Dress in the Early Jesus Movement* makes broad use of ritual theory and material culture to analyze first-century early Christ movement literature.

In both these fields that indirectly work on ritual theory by virtue of their attention to human subjectivity, the emerging work on early Christian ritual life has thin strands of coherence and wide areas of blank space.

Discipline: character and dynamics of community

Critical study of community has been an explicit dimension of early Christian scholarship for more than 50 years. Although the intense attention given to these issues in the 1980s did not persist, there is still strong attention to community. Both earlier and more recent work examine community in relation to rituals (e.g., the trajectory from Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* [1983] to Todd D. Still and David G. Horrell's *After the First Urban Christians* [2009]). This current book also exhibits strong interest in the relationship between community and early Christian ritual life. Jason T. Lamoreaux's "Ritual Negotiation" (Chapter 7) focuses on different kinds of community identity within what he sees as two different parties concerned about the rituals of meat in Corinth's markets and homes. Similarly, Richard S. Ascough's "Ritual Modification and Innovation" thinks about how ritual changes affect communities (Chapter 9). My own 2009 work, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity*, looks at the various ritualizations in play during the Greco–Roman meal, which ended up providing the primary form for the central gatherings of various Christ groups in the first and second centuries and early Christian groups in the second and third centuries.[2] Of high interest in this work is

the community formational dimensions of the Greco–Roman meal. It uses several ritual theories which to a substantial degree cohere with one another (Catherine Bell, Jonathan Z. Smith, Mary Douglas). The book examines how conflict, identity formation, relationship with Roman imperial forces in the larger society, gender tension, rejection, and inclusion are addressed through a variety of ritualizations in the meal itself. Because these meal groups were relatively small (perhaps between six and thirty persons), these ritualizations played major roles in building, challenging, and mitigating communal formation. This book has depended deeply on Dennis Smith's *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* and Matthias Klinghardt's *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie fruhchrist-licher Mahlfeiern*, each of which independently of the other proposed the Greco–Roman meal as the overarching ritual form for the primary first and second century Christ group gatherings. In terms of the intellectual discipline of analyzing the character and dynamics of early Christ groups and early Christian communities, both books highlight the key link between community formation and the meal ritual. Klinghardt's book title tells it all with its German word play linking the community meal (*Gemeinschaftsmahl)* and meal community (*Mahlgemeinschaft*). The subtitle of the book lays out the academic disciplines (the sociology and liturgy of early Christian festive meals). Very similarly, Smith's work portrays the communal dynamics of the early Christian groups directly dependent on the meal's ritual character.

It is difficult for me to discern how broad a scholarly consensus exists about the Greco–Roman meal providing central character and dynamics for the community in early Christ groups. Although these three books were central to the eight-year term of the Society of Biblical Literature's Seminar in the early 2000s, which Smith and I co-chaired and to which Klinghardt belonged, it seems likely that this common hypothesis in the three books has significant standing in the academic guild. It is not quite as clear that the New Testament and Early Christianity academic guild blesses this description of Christian community centered in the Greco–Roman meal type.

What does seem more certain is the connection between ritual eating together in early Christian settings and the character and dynamics of community itself. The disciplined academic study of community and ritual eating in early Christianity is firmly developed, in some contrast to the relatively deep fissures that still exist in ritual theory and the more nascent character of material culture studies relative to early Christian ritual life.

State of the study of early Christian ritual life

A striking aspect of this book is its general focus on micro moments in early Christian ritual life. With some exceptions, it does not look at larger issues and patterns of how ritual works for something provisionally called early Christ movements or early Christianity. So the following examination of the current status of early Christian life mostly looks at scholarly material outside this book in order that this conclusion can provide some broader frames of reference, as a complement to the specificities of the book's essays.

Although a written history of the study of early Christian ritual life would be extraordinarily helpful for current and future scholarship, this book's conclusion is not the place for it. Instead, this particular portion of the conclusion seeks to assess the current moment of the study of early Christian ritual life. Since the previous section of this chapter examined the ways the study of early Christian ritual is done at this juncture, this section considers an overall status of the content of ritual study. Here I have used both diachronic and synchronic categories in attempting to describe the status of various study areas in order to provide a somewhat thicker overview of the general status of study of early Christian ritual life.

In his 2008 review of similar issues, Richard DeMaris acknowledges the very early stage in which study of early Christian ritual life stands: "We are probably several years away from being ready to conduct a comprehensive critical study of rites in the New Testament" (2008, 5). Since almost ten years have passed since DeMaris's remark, and this volume shows only modest evidence that we are ready to produce such a study of the rites in the New Testament, it will probably be another decade before a first such comprehensive critical study will be available. Certainly, no such comprehensive study has been produced yet.

To my mind, what is needed most for the production of something like a comprehensive critical study of rites in the New Testament (or, even more broadly, of the first three centuries of emerging Christianity) is progress in bigger frame and complicated theorization of ritual life. The following set of subject matters helps imagine what bigger frames need to be taken into account for an even larger project such as the one DeMaris described.

Current study status of Galilean ritual life at the time and in the orbit of Jesus and the first generation of followers

It is not clear whether there were synagogue buildings in the first half of the first century CE in Galilee. It seems probable that there were synagogues (literally meetings) for prayers and readings, even if there were not special buildings. Whether women attended is simply unclear.

There was at least one Roman temple in Galilee during this time (Omrit in the northeastern corner) and perhaps as many as three (Sephoris, Tiberias). Sacrifices to the emperor and related gods occurred, and there was a real possibility of baths and dining rooms attached to the temples themselves.

It is not clear how much Roman sculpture/public display of Roman heroes/gods and occasions for votive offerings existed in Galilee. It seems likely that some Roman villas included small outdoor altars for domestic festivities.

Perhaps the clearest ritual practice in Galilee in the first 50 years of the Common Era relative to Jesus groups was the Greco–Roman meal. Although earlier generations of scholars were uncertain about this, it now seems clear that a wide variety of people had these festive meals one to five or six times a month. These meals contained a wide variety of ritualizations, including reclining, libations, prayers, and entertainment. These meals were rarely just for private families, and mostly for

somewhat larger groups of neighbors, colleagues, clubs, and synagogues. Although earlier generations of scholars thought that these meals were only for the elite, there is now strong evidence for such meals at most levels of the economy. In any case, it is probable that Jesus groups participated in this larger mix of these meal practices.

Similarly, regular and irregular, private or semi-private bathings occurred for almost all classes. In contrast to Greco–Roman cities, they were rarely held in bathhouses, but rather in smaller semi-private house settings, streams, or lakes. These washings were by and large collective, but divided between the sexes. It seems highly likely that Jesus groups were a part of these larger practices.

Current study status of ritual life in the orbit of Paul

Unlike in Galilee, it is likely that synagogues were actual buildings located in urban settings, but it is not clear how much these buildings were distinguishable from other club sites. For the most part Christ clubs (associations)[3] would have met in homes or rented spaces. Some of the homes may have been patrician and as such had a dining room, whereas many homes were probably one or two rooms, the larger of which would have been multipurpose and thus suitable for Christ groups. Such rooms may have functioned as improvised dining rooms with makeshift arrangements for reclining.

The rituals of festive meals and bathing that occurred in Galilee in the first half of the first century also took place in the more urban orbit of Paul through 60 CE. Probably in many cities the options for bathings or washings were less related to streams and lakes. In this urban environment there were more festive meals for Christ groups in association-owned or rented buildings.

Current study status of festive meals in the first two centuries CE in Jesus-related gatherings

Festive meals were the primary feature of Jesus-related[4] gatherings until at least 150 CE, and in many regions for much longer. In the second half of the second century, there were increasing pressures from leadership for uniform prayers and gestures across regions. By 175 CE, while many festive meals related to Jesus and Christ movements continued for quite a while, a significant number of such gatherings were in the morning rather than the evening, without a full meal, in meeting spaces larger than rooms in typical urban housing. In many other cases the festive meals persisted and were not supplanted by the morning mini-meal. And in still other quarters both the morning event and the evening festive meal occurred in a complementary manner.

Current study status of ritual washings in Christ groups in the first and second century CE

It is likely that Christ groups and early Christian groups participated in ritualized washings from Jesus's generation through the end of the second century. It is also possible that these washings lessened in the last half or third of the second century.

These washings, done by people associated with Christ groups or early Christian groups, were almost certainly the kinds of purification rites that occurred throughout the Mediterranean basin, and were loosely and non-exclusively associated with a variety of somewhat explicitly religious frameworks. In this frame, for at least until the late second century and perhaps beyond, it was in some cases likely and other cases probable that members of Christ groups participated in washings not associated with their Christ groups or early Christian groups. It also seems likely that some other people who did not associate with the Christ groups participated with them in washings/bathings that Christ people had organized.

I include in this general category of washings particular one-time, somewhat initiatory, washings. Here I am careful to include, but not reify, what could/should/ might be called "baptisms." Since the term *baptizō* means bathing and could with not much difficulty be called washing, I include this kind of washing/bathing/initiation in the larger phenomenon of washings in this section of the conclusion. The overlapping, varied, and multiple descriptions of "baptisms" allow and perhaps suggest that one-time, somewhat initiatory washings developed over a period of 50 to 75 years in the first century as a part of the larger washing category, some related to the John the Bather movement and some not. It is clear that all the washings shared the possible locations of streams, lakes, domestic pools, and city pools.

By the second century there were much closer connections between the one-time initiatory washings/baptisms and a full-blown initiatory event in Christ groups. And, by the end of the second century, there may have been domestic pools used primarily, if not exclusively, for something that could be called "baptisms" in the later Christian senses. The trajectory from the first generation of Jesus communities to the end of the second century is not yet possible to outline.

Current study status of ritual life relative to gender in Israel-and-Jesus-related[5] settings in the first two centuries CE

In many Christ groups and early Christian groups, there were a range of genders in open practice, including married women and men, single sexually active men, single sexually active women, single sexually relatively inactive men, single sexually inactive women, single celibate women, married celibate women, single celibate men, married celibate men, divorced sexually active women, divorced sexually active men, divorced sexually inactive women, divorced sexually inactive men, widowed sexually inactive men, widowed sexually active women, and widowed sexually active men. All of these persons' gender orientation were acknowledged, mostly actively but some tacitly. Some of these gender orientations were explicitly honored ritually, some were tacitly honored, and some were actively and/or tacitly shamed. As far as we know, marriage rituals occurred in these Christ groups and early Christian groups in ways indistinguishable from non-Christ-related identities/ affiliations.

As for gender and festive meals, it is difficult to parse what percentage of such meals were attended by men only, what percentage were "male and female" in

reclining positions (but with men and women reclining on different sides of the dining space), or which were with men reclining and women sitting at the feet of men or standing. But it seems nearly certain that all of these options were occurring, and that on a significant number of occasions each of these meal options was contested. Although probably infrequently, it seems likely that some groups sometimes banned divorced persons and some single sexually active women and men from participating in their festive meals.

It is highly probable that all men and women in these groups participated in ritual washings of several kinds, but were separated as women and men. Their participation likely occurred both as groups and outside of relationships to groups. It seems probable that participation in washings became more explicitly a part of belonging to a Christ or early Christian group as the second century neared its end and as Christ/Christian associations became somewhat more exclusive.

Prospects for the study of Early Christian ritual life

What might the future of the study of early Christian ritual life look like? What would be the next steps beyond this book and the thickening cord of discrete studies of individual early Christian rituals? What work can advance larger intentions in relationship to a fuller integration of ritual studies into rewritings of history of early Christianity?

It is not appropriate that I, as only one part of this book's authorship, imagine ways to address these questions. And, such questions are only addressed best in the collective in any case. After suggesting earlier methodologies, disciplines, and broader frames of content, here (with some embarrassment of my hubris) I conclude with four key elements of future collective work among those who are working on early Christian ritual life and four arenas of consideration which might impair advances in future collective work.

Four challenges for future study

Collective scholarship on early Christian ritual life faces some significant challenges within broader notions in scholarship, ritual studies, and twenty-first-century Christianity. These challenges have much to do with the fabric of long-held values and assumptions which could derail effective study. My sense of four such challenges are:

1   The master narrative of Christian beginnings. Long-term and persistent assumptions in much scholarship and conventional Christianity are not supported by a range of critical scholarship. These assumptions have in the past fifteen years come to be called "the master narrative" of Christian origins and early Christian history. This master narrative consists of the following: The beginnings of Christianity happened through the singularly wise and powerful teachings and actions of Jesus. This Jesus communicated successfully these

singularly wise and powerful teachings and his own salvific actions to his fol-
lowers, primarily the apostles. The apostles in turn communicated them to
the bishops and leaders of "The Church." This Church then formulated them
into the Nicene and other creeds, which have guided Christianity correctly
across the centuries. Study of early Christian ritual that implicitly or explicitly
assumes the master narrative would place the character of ritual in subordinate
roles to the values of the master narrative. This would harm scholars' abilities
to examine early Christian ritual on its own terms and distort the texts and
materials for study.

2   Less broadly acknowledged are the widely held assumptions in scholarship that
Christianity as a "religion" in the twenty-first century is a coherent phenom-
enon. Many scholars of early Christianity retroject this sense of Christianity as
a coherent phenomenon onto early Christianity. Such a notion of a coherent
religion would make it difficult for scholarship about early Christian ritual to
allow the play, double and triple takes, and complexities of ritual to stand, and
would push scholarship to neglect some of these significant traits of ritual in
favor of coherence.

3   The notion of ritual as a universal phenomenon. Some serious scholarship,
especially studies dependent on the works of C. G. Jung, Joseph Campbell, and
Mircea Eliade, portrays ritual as a universal reality. Such notions strip ritual of
the complex and open-ended social dynamics that occur in some ritualization.
Such theoretical positions make it difficult to think clearly about the contin-
gencies of some rituals in early Christianity.

4   It is not uncommon for Europeans and North Americans to assume that
Christian ritual is inherently sophisticated and meaningful. This social privi-
leging of Christendom and Church can easily and unconsciously impose itself
on the study early Christian ritual life.

Four key elements of future collective work

What follows are desiderata for the future study of early Christian rituals.

1   Scholars in this field working on ritual theory in direct relationship to subject
matter of early Christian ritual life. This kind of work would use existing theo-
retical frameworks on ritual, amend and combine such existing ritual theory,
and produce new theoretical initiatives that work well with study of early
Christian ritual life. As noted earlier, cleaner, more elaborate, and epistemologi-
cally clearer ritual theory is needed both more generally within ritual studies
and more particularly in the study of early Christian ritual.

2   Initiatives on institutional, guild, and individual levels that study sets of ritual
phenomena. These study sets could very well be in relationship to the broader
frames of content addressed in the earlier diachronic and synchronic catego-
ries summarized within the status of study section. My sense is that such ini-
tiatives cannot be quite as broad as the "comprehensive critical study of rites

in the New Testament" described by DeMaris, but they can be substantially larger than the subject matter of the individual chapters of this book. They would be small to medium-sized collective projects on the level of conferences and colloquia.

3   Continued collective focus on ritual context and environment in explicit relationship to early Christian ritual life. This book, both in its individual chapters and in DeMaris's Introduction, has made this clear as a long-term dimension of this broader study.

4   A social epistemology. One of the problems of nascent ritual studies of early Christianity has been the paucity of collective work and the over-reliance on individual work. At the same time the study of early Christian ritual life needs to focus primarily on social dimensions of those first three centuries of Christ groups and early Christian groups. This book's form has assumed such a social epistemology, and future work can work more deeply and productively with this assumption.

It is my hope the careful and critical work of this book will provide important support for the next stages of scholarship on early Christian ritual life.

Notes

1   I use here the term "Christianities" to suggest that early Christianity and even later Christianity as unified and coherent is dubious. But I do not use this term again, citing it here only to raise attention to the presumptiveness of the singular.
2   Throughout this chapter I use these two phrases, "Christ groups" and "early Christian groups," to distinguish Jesus-and-Christ-related groups that understood themselves to belong overall to larger Israel (including the Diaspora) and existed before the advent of actual "Christianity" from groups whose (later) identity placed them within an authentic larger set of "Christian groups."
3   I am using the term "Christ groups" or "Christ clubs" to distinguish them from later groups in the late second and early third centuries that had more stable Christian identity.
4   Here too is another term meant to distinguish early groups with clear Christian identity. In this case I use Jesus to indicate the character of Israel-related groups.
5   I use this clumsy phrase to acknowledge that it is impossible to make distinctions between Christ groups and other kinds of Israel-based groups.

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